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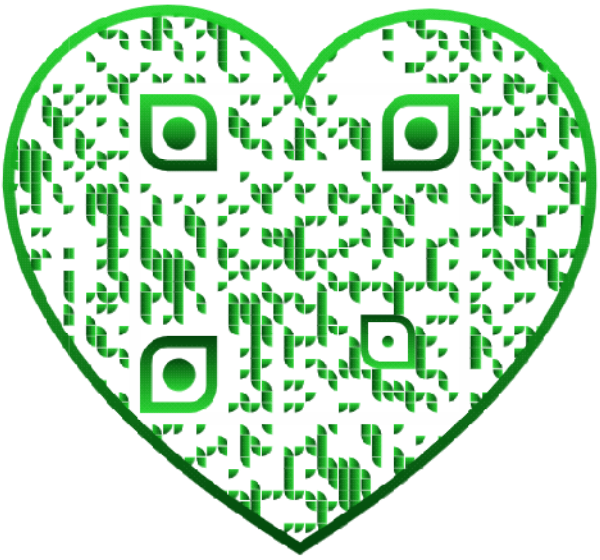

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Welcome

Hello and welcome to the January issue of *Airliner World*, incorporating *Airports of the World*. It's probably no surprise that the star of this month's edition is none other than the Airbus A321XLR. The type's entry into long-haul service on November 14, 2024, was a highly anticipated event and marked the apex of the A321's evolutionary journey over more than 30 years. Indeed, the A321-100 of 1992 is worlds apart from the A321XLR of today, but I do wonder if Airbus knew back then that it had a winning hand.

The new variant is the culmination of five years' work by the manufacturer to eke extra range out of its already modestly long-legged narrowbody. The type boasts 4,700nm (5,400 miles) of range – enough to link New York with Rome, London to Vancouver, Delhi to London and Sydney to Kuala Lumpur – primarily achieved through the addition of a rear centre fuel tank (RCT). The standard A321neo offers 3,500nm (4,000 miles) of range, while the A321LR can travel an extra 500nm (575 miles). Whenever a new aircraft type enters the fray, it usually revolutionises the industry in some way. Notable examples include the Boeing 747, which opened up air travel to the masses, and Concorde, which brought about a supersonic age of passenger flight. More recently, the Boeing 787 could lay claim to introducing a new age of point-to-point, long-haul flying, which enabled hundreds of new routes to be opened. As you will read in Chris Sloan's superb in-depth article starting on page 88, the A321XLR is destined to reshape long-haul international flying in its own way.

Elsewhere in this issue we've an eclectic mix of articles from all corners of the world. With the demise of Bonza and the collapse of Rex, Australia was not short of sensational stories in 2024. Chris Frame investigates what's going on 'down under' and why the Qantas/Virgin Australia duopoly seems to be unbreakable. From the US, Matteo Legnani tries out an airline called Aero, which is offering semi-private flights to a handful of destinations using Embraer ERJ135s. Meanwhile, our own Lee Cross has been to Dublin to meet the team behind Emerald Airlines, the current operator of the Aer Lingus Regional franchise.

While travelling to the Grand Canyon for the Microsoft Flight Simulator launch preview event in September (*Airliner World* November 2024), I had the pleasure of visiting Flagstaff Pulliam Airport in northern Arizona. Whether it's the cosy feel, short and sometimes non-existent queues for security screening, or front row seats to watch the turnaround, there's something magical about small airports and I make every effort to use them when I can. As you can read in my article, Flagstaff is navigating its own set of challenges, but has all the ingredients of a thriving regional gateway.

Finally, you may notice we've started a new mini-series with the 'does what it says on the tin' name of *How it works*. With this, we hope to lift the lid on the methods (and sometimes madness) of the industry's inner workings, which you might not have previously considered. Our own Rob Veitch kicks things off with a fascinating article exploring the secrets of slots. If you have a subject you'd like us to cover, please do get in touch with your suggestion.

Wherever you are in the world, I hope you enjoy this issue.

Thomas

Thomas Haynes
Editor

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BELOW: ***Airbus A321XLR, F-WWBZ (c/n 11058), is one of three XLR testbed aircraft used by the manufacturer to test and certify the type*** AIRBUS

COVER: ***Ahead of its delivery to Iberia, Airbus A321XLR, EC-OIL (c/n 11504) – then registered D-AVYR – returns from a test flight on October 18, 2024*** DIRK GROTHE

XLR
AIRBUS A321
flying xtra long range
F-WWBZ
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neo

this month

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Hola A321XLR

IBERIA
EC-OIL

SPANISH FLAG carrier Iberia has taken delivery of its first Airbus A321XLR, becoming the launch operator of the world's newest single-aisle aircraft. EC-OIL (c/n 11504) was handed over on October 30 and was subsequently operated by Iberia on a number of regional flights across its European network before its first transatlantic mission from Madrid to Boston on November 14.

Marco Sansavini, CEO and chairman at Iberia, said: "We are very proud to be the launch airline for this new Airbus aircraft. The A321XLR will allow us to reach new destinations, operating transoceanic routes and doing so in a more efficient way."

Christian Scherer, CEO of Commercial Aircraft at Airbus, added: "The A321XLR will enable countless new non-stop destinations; it truly opens a new chapter in air connectivity. It is another proud "first" for all of us at Airbus in our constant quest to innovate and bring value to our customers. We are pleased to share this special moment with a special customer: gracias y felicidades Iberia."

The newly delivered narrowbody seats 182 passengers in a two-class layout with lie-flat business class seats with direct aisle access. Powered by two CFM International LEAP-1A engines, the A321XLR is the next evolutionary step from the A320neo which responds to market needs for even more range and payload, creating more value for the airlines. It will deliver up to 4,700nm – 15% more range than the A321LR and with 30% lower fuel burn per seat compared with previous generation competitor aircraft, as well as reduced NOx emissions and noise. So far, Airbus has secured more than 500 orders for the aircraft. Read the full report on the A321XLR from page 88. (Photo Airbus)

Jet2 lands at Luton

BRITAIN'S THIRD largest airline Jet2 will open its 13th UK airport base at London/Luton next April. The move comes amid continued expansion by the leisure carrier which, during 2024, opened a base at Liverpool/John Lennon and announced a new base at Bournemouth which is due to begin operations in early February 2025.

From April 1, Jet2 will position two brand-new Airbus A321neos at Luton which will operate flights to 17 destinations across Europe, the Canary Islands and Mediterranean. The move to open a base at Luton will position Jet2 firmly in easyJet territory and with the latter's package holiday division growing rapidly in recent years, it is likely this was a factor in Jet2's decision-making.

Meanwhile, Jet2 reported a strong financial performance in its half-year results up to the end of September 2024. Revenue was up 15% to £5.08bn while profit before tax rose 20% to £791.4m, compared with the same period in 2023. The company's cash reserves increased by 9% to £2.3bn, providing it with the unusual ability to purchase many of the new incoming A321neos in cash.

In the financial report, the airline said that it was on track to deliver year-end profit, before foreign exchange revaluation and taxation, ahead of market expectations. Summer 2025 capacity is also 9% higher than the previous year, boosted by the new bases at Bournemouth and Luton.

Elsewhere, as new A321neos continue to come on stream, the airline will imminently be retiring its last Boeing 757, ending more than 40 years of passenger operations by British-registered 757s. At the time of writing, the carrier still has three in its fleet, but these are due to be phased out by early January – ending the company's near 20-year association with the type.

Emirates returns to Edinburgh

UAE FLAG carrier Emirates has landed in the Scottish capital for the first time since 2020 as the airline resumes its direct service between Edinburgh and Dubai. The carrier will operate a daily flight between the two capitals year-round.

In what was supposed to be a double celebration involving Emirates' new flagship Airbus A350, delays to the aircraft's delivery meant that a Boeing 777-200LR was left to inaugurate the route. The widebody, A6-EWB (c/n 35573), was welcomed to the capital with a performance from members of the world-famous Edinburgh Military Tattoo, piping the flight onto stand.

The route will initially be served by a 777 before the airline introduces its very first A350 onto the route, complete with Emirates' premium economy product and its brand-new business class cabin.

Adnan Kazim, Emirates' deputy president and chief commercial officer said: "The UK is one of our most important markets, and we're proud to reinstate our footprint in Scotland – a country that's loved by visitors from around the world... With 14 weekly flights to and from the country passengers can now easily connect to popular long-haul destinations such as Thailand, Australia, and of course the vibrant city of Dubai." (Photo Edinburgh Airport)

Boeing, going, gone

TUI
TUI.COM
PH-OYJ
BOEING 767-300

After a 40-year association with the Boeing 767 which began with Britannia Airways, TUI Group has retired its last example of the American-built widebody. PH-OYJ (c/n 29384), which was operated by TUI fly Netherlands, flew its final passenger flight on November 3, returning holidaymakers to Amsterdam/Schiphol from Lanzarote. The 767-304ER was then ferried to Istanbul/Sabiha Gokcen the following day (pictured on departure) for cargo conversion. For the past year, Yankee Juliet has been the sole 767 in use by TUI after its UK subsidiary, TUI Airways, retired its last example, G-OBYF (c/n 28208), on November 1, 2023 V1IMAGES.COM/ROBERT EIKELENBOOM

Norse **looks east**

NORWEGIAN LOW-COST long-haul carrier Norse Atlantic Airways is to establish a presence in Sweden for the first time next winter when it begins direct flights between Stockholm/Arlanda and Bangkok. The new route will begin on October 29, 2025, and will be operated twice-weekly on Wednesdays and Saturdays, using a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner. The carrier already serves the Thai capital from Oslo.

Bjørn Tore Larsen, CEO and founder of Norse, said: "This new route ensures travellers have a premium yet budget-friendly choice on one of the most in-demand long-haul routes. Our modern Boeing 787 Dreamliners, combined with exceptional service from our crew, deliver affordable and comfortable flights to cost-conscious travellers, making global connections more accessible, seamless, and enjoyable for everyone."

Meanwhile, October 2024 saw Norse record its highest-ever load factor for a month, achieving 90%, which represented a 15% year-on-year increase. During October, Norse had 118,502 passengers, equating to an increase of 16% compared to a year earlier, across 410 flights, including 50 charters. The carrier said it completed 99% of scheduled flights in the month, while 74% of flights arrived within 15 minutes of their scheduled arrival time.

NORSE
flynorse.com

Separately, one year after making history as the first Boeing 787 Dreamliner to land in Antarctica, Norse successfully completed its second charter to the continent. On November 15, 2024, 787-9, LN-FNC (c/n 38790), touched down at Troll Airfield carrying scientists and 10.5 tonnes of research equipment for the Norwegian Polar Institute. (Photo Erik Moen/ Norse Atlantic Airways)

Bankruptcy beckons for Nordica

ESTONIA'S NORDIC Aviation Group ceased operations and filed for bankruptcy, after an investor decided not to proceed with a planned privatisation of the company. The Tallinn-based group operates under the Nordica brand and has a subsidiary called Regional Jet, which trades as Xfly.

In a statement in November, the firm said that after "assessing the company's economic situation, the management board has decided to cease the airline's operations and file for bankruptcy".

Remco Althuis, CEO of Nordic Aviation Group, added: "Nordic Aviation Group and Xfly have gone through a challenging path over the past 15 months since the airline began its turnaround process in August 2023. This journey has been marked by immense efforts from the entire team to bring the airline to a new and sustainable footing."

He added: "Our aim is to hand over the aircraft Nordic Aviation Group and Xfly are using to the lessors at the first possible time, most likely during the upcoming days."

Before the bankruptcy, the group was using a selection of Bombardier CRJs, ATR 72s and Airbus A320s.

in brief

Budget operator **easyJet** has launched a tranche of new routes for 2025 including London/Gatwick to Cape Verde – its first sub-Saharan route. Others include Gatwick to Rimini, plus Luton to Almeira, Funchal and Izmir. Birmingham will see new services to Gran Canaria, Malta, Marrakesh and Reykjavik, while new links to Izmir, Kalamata, Larnaca, Madrid and Rennes will operate from Manchester. New routes also include Edinburgh to Enfidha, Olbia and Marrakech, Glasgow to Antalya and Reus, Leeds/Bradford to Malaga and Palma, Liverpool to Split, Newcastle to Malaga, and Belfast to Reus.

Riga-based **airBaltic** recorded the highest volume of October traffic in its history after carrying 479,800 passengers during the month. The figure represented an 11% increase on the same time last year, aided by a 5.7% rise in its load factor, which increased to 84.1%. Total flights for the month increased 2% on 2023, with 4,160 services. The airline operates an all-Airbus fleet of 49 A220-300s.

Italian boutique airline **SkyAlps** has launched new services from its Bolzano hub for 2025. A seasonal weekly link to Gothenburg starts on January 18, and twice-weekly services to Hannover will begin on May 1, with seasonal weekly connections to Menorca and Kefalonia commencing on June 6 and 7, respectively. Having recently increased its frequency to London/ Gatwick to three times a week, the airline will also operate its Antwerp-Bolzano service year-round.

Romanian airline **Dan Air** partnered with state-owned flag carrier **TAROM** to operate daily flights on the Bucharest-Madrid route between November 22, 2024 and January 13, 2025. The ACMI contract, which covers a period when one of TAROM's aircraft will be unavailable due to maintenance, will see 2009-vintage Airbus A320-232, YR-JUL (c/n 3863), support these flights.

British Airways is planning a multi-million-pound investment in its engineering maintenance facility at Cardiff Airport. The project – which is part of the flag carrier's £7bn transformation plan – will see one of three existing bays be expanded to accommodate the operator's Airbus A350s. Currently, the complex has only been able to support Boeing 777 and 787s. Work is expected to get underway in 2025 and will be completed by the end of the year.

Ryanair reduces traffic target

RYANAIR
EI-HGF

LOW-COST GIANT Ryanair has been forced to reduce its 2026 financial year (FY26) passenger target by five million, to 210 million, amid continued delivery delays relating to its Boeing 737 MAXs.

In its FY25 half-year results, the company said it was expecting its remaining nine deliveries originally due for Q3 to slip into Q4 because of recent strikes at the airframer's US assembly lines.

The report said: "While we continue to work with Boeing leadership to accelerate aircraft deliveries ahead of peak [summer 2025], the risk of further delivery delays remains high. We believe it is therefore sensible to moderate Ryanair's FY26 traffic growth target to 210m passengers (previously 215m) to reflect these delivery delays, as we wish to avoid being over-scheduled, over-crewed and over costed as we were in [summer 2024]."

For the first six months of the FY25, Ryanair saw passenger numbers hit 115.3 million, up 9% on the same period last year. Load factor remained unchanged at 95%, while the average fare fell 10% to €52, which meant revenue only rose 1% to €8.69bn. Operating costs for the period rose 8% compared to the previous year, meaning profit after tax fell 18% to €1.79bn. (Photo Ryanair)

New era, new aircraft

LESS THAN a month after Czech Airlines (CSA) ceased flying operations, what would have been its first Airbus A220 was instead delivered to Smartwings, the airline which has since taken over its flying duties.

A220-300, OK-EYA (c/n 55311), was flown from Montreal/Mirabel to Prague/Vaclav Havel via Reykjavík/Keflavík on November 21. Emblazoned in a CSA colour scheme, the next-generation narrowbody is configured to seat 149 passengers in a single-class layout.

Yankee Alpha is the first of four A220s originally due for CSA as part of a 2023 long-term lease agreement with Air Lease Corporation.

The arrival came just 26 days after the historic cessation of Czech Airlines' operations after 101 years on October 26, 2024. Following that, the flag carrier handed over its flying duties to Smartwings and was subsequently repurposed into a holding company.

The final flight duties fell to OK767, which connected Paris/Charles de Gaulle with the airline's base at Prague/Vaclav Havel. The service was operated by Airbus A320-214, OK-IOO (c/n 03762) – a 15-year-old former Cebu Pacific example.

The 180-seat airliner was filled with passengers and aviation enthusiasts aiming to share in the momentous occasion. *Airliner World* was on board the historic flight so look out for a full report in the February issue of the magazine. (Photo prgairside)

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Russia's regionals on a knife edge

MORE THAN 30 Russian airlines are on the brink of bankruptcy, according to the country's *Izvestia* newspaper.

The carriers, which account for around 26% of domestic passenger traffic, face mounting financial pressures due to debts incurred from the lease of foreign aircraft.

Following the introduction of Western sanctions against Russia in 2022, many airlines stopped making payments on leased aircraft, leading to a growing amount of debt. The Russian government has said that airlines will be able to write off some of this debt in 2025. However, the carriers will then be hit with a 25% tax on the written-off amounts, a figure that could be too high for the smaller operators already struggling amid the harsh economic climate across the country.

Larger carriers, such as Aeroflot, S7 Airlines and Ural Airlines, have reached agreements with lessors over leasing issues by buying back these aircraft, but the smaller carriers don't have the money to do the same.

Meanwhile, *The Moscow Times* and *Kommersant* have reported that many smaller Russian carriers may be forced to cancel hundreds of domestic flights in the new year. The media outlets said that the Ministry of Transport of Russia and Rosaviatsiya, the country's federal air transport agency, have been unable to agree with the finance ministry on the terms of subsidies amounting to 19bn roubles. If the subsidies are not forthcoming, the airlines will have to either sell tickets for the flights at commercial costs, adjust their current schedules from January 1, or leave the route altogether. (Photo Boeing)

Business first for Air Astana

the shanyraq

AIR ASTANA has opened its first-ever business class lounge at its Almaty International Airport hub. The Shanyrak, as the lounge is called, is available exclusively to the airline's business class passengers and eligible Nomad Club loyalty members departing on its international services.

The "luxurious and spacious" lounge area features various premium features, including separate work and rest areas, parent-and-child room, showers and facilities for passengers with limited mobility. Guests can also enjoy a selection of hot meals, snacks and beverages. Open 24 hours a day, the lounge can accommodate 100 passengers.

Air Astana said it had collaborated with several local and international partners to manage the lounge and offer a top-tier experience for its customers. The carrier has also incorporated various aspects of Kazakh culture, including design motifs and patterns inspired by art from the country and locally sourced materials for interior decoration. The lounge's name, 'Shanyrak', refers to the traditional circular crown of a yurt, symbolising home and hospitality in Kazakh culture.

The nation's flag carrier hopes to expand its lounge offering in the future and is exploring opportunities to open similar facilities across the country.

Meanwhile, the airline also announced it would launch a new thrice-weekly service from Astana to the Vietnamese island of Phu Quoc, from December 3. The flight joins the airline's existing service from Almaty, which took off on October 28. It will be operated by one of the carrier's Airbus A321LRs, which have recently been modified to have an additional fuel tank for long-haul operations. Air Astana has been expanding its presence in the Asia-Pacific region, including a new thrice-weekly service from Astana to Phuket and daily flights from Astana to Bangkok. (Photo Air Astana)

Azerbaijan's Malé debut

AZERBAIJAN AIRLINES (AZAL) has launched new direct flights from Baku to Malé, the capital of the Republic of Maldives. The maiden flight, operated by one of the carrier's Boeing 787-8 Dreamliners, touched down at Velana International Airport on November 9. The flight will be operated twice weekly on Mondays and Saturdays.

A welcoming ceremony was held in Malé for the inaugural service, and passengers were greeted with traditional wreaths to symbolise hospitality and friendship.

The airline's chief commercial officer, Jamil Manizade, said: "We are pleased to launch direct regular flights from Baku to Malé. This service opens new opportunities for tourists seeking a paradise holiday experience. The Azerbaijani market has long needed more options for winter tourism, and the Maldives is one of the most popular destinations in the world this season."

Mohamed Mihad, Maldives Airports Company chief commercial officer, added: "The launch of AZAL's direct flights from Baku marks a significant milestone for Velana International Airport. This route establishes an invaluable connection between Central Asia and the Maldives, providing seamless connectivity and enhanced travel options for customers journeying from Azerbaijan to our idyllic islands."

Azerbaijan Airlines has two 787-8s in its fleet, VP-BBR (c/n 37920) and VP-BBS (c/n 37921), delivered to the airline in December 2014. The aircraft are configured with 210 seats in a three-class layout. The airline also has eight Dreamliners on order, deliveries of which are scheduled to start in 2026. (Photo Azerbaijan Airlines)

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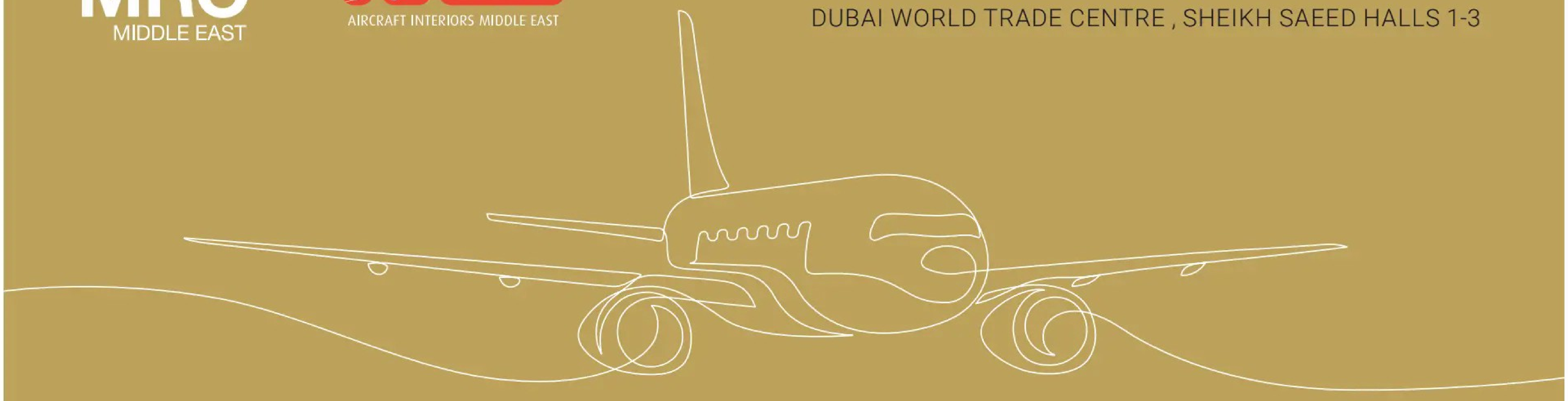

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Etihad exits codeshare

ETIHAD AIRWAYS will end its codesharing agreement with Virgin Australia on June 1, 2025, in a decision which "reflects a divergence in the strategic direction of the respective airlines," according to the Abu Dhabi-based carrier. Once the separation is effective, passengers will be unable to book Virgin Australia flights via Etihad.

The Australian carrier has recently strengthened its partnership with Etihad's rival Qatar Airways after the latter announced its intention to purchase a 25% stake in the firm from Bain Capital. The agreement, which is subject to government approval, will enable Virgin to operate services from Melbourne, Sydney, Perth and Brisbane to Doha.

Etihad has flown to Australia since 2007 and said it remains dedicated to serving the country, after plans to increase its flight frequencies to Sydney and Melbourne in 2025 were revealed. Currently, it connects both cities daily with Boeing 777-300ERs and 787-9 Dreamliners. The airline had a strong summer and said its nine-month net profit reached $382m as passenger numbers rose by 35%, and the average load factor eased upwards to 87%, with cargo revenues up 21%.

Elsewhere, on October 31, 2024 Etihad celebrated its first year of operations from Terminal A at Zayed International Airport. CEO Antonoaldo Neves said: "In just one year, Terminal A has transformed the travel experience for our guests and supported Etihad's ambitious growth plans. This world-class facility has enabled us to enhance our service standards significantly, offering greater comfort and convenience while strengthening Abu Dhabi's position as a global aviation hub."

(Photo Etihad Airways)

MEA nets profit

MIDDLE EAST Airlines announced an annual net profit of $88.8m for 2023, despite the economic stresses being endured by Lebanon and the outbreak of regional conflict with Israel. The profit was boosted by a 20% rise in passenger revenues totalling $725m, while costs increased by 13% over the year. Routes to the Middle East accounted for 55% of revenues, with 39% coming from European links and the remaining 6% from African operations.

The flag carrier said Lebanon had been enduring the "biggest crisis" since gaining independence in 1943, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Beirut port explosion, economic collapse and the impact of the Israel-Gaza conflict all having an effect.

At the end of 2023 it had capital expenditure commitments amounting to $900m, including the acquisition of four Airbus A330neos and six A321neos. The airline took delivery of A321neo OD-M10 (c/n 11558) last March, although the aircraft was parked at Larnaca at the end of October. Six of the remaining jets are due in 2026, two more in 2027, with the last arriving in 2028. It currently operates an all-Airbus fleet of 21 aircraft comprising seven A320-200s, ten A321neos and four A330-200s. Meanwhile, it remains the prime operator at Beirut Airport, after several other airlines suspended services during the autumn.

(Photo Airbus)

10 000 A320
MEA
neo

Emirates profits boost

EMIRATES POSTED a net profit of £2.09bn after it generated a 5% increase in revenues to £13.4bn for the six months to September 30, up 2% on the same time last year. Overall capacity increased by 5%, with seat capacity rising 4%, to achieve an average load factor of 80%, after carrying a total 26.9 million passengers.

The number of destinations served has increased to 148 with the addition of Phnom Penh, Bogota and Madagascar. The carrier reintroduced five Boeing 777-300ERs and three Airbus A380s after a cabin refurbishment, which is part of a wider $4bn scheme. The 777s have been deployed on services to Brussels, Geneva and Tokyo/Haneda. The airline has also invested in new lounges at London/Stansted and Jeddah, and refurbished its existing facility at Paris/Charles de Gaulle.

At 1.2 million tonnes, Emirates SkyCargo shifted 16% more cargo volume, with Chinese e-commerce making a significant contribution. Capacity has been increased with the addition of a 777F and two wet-leased 747Fs, while also placing orders for ten more 777Fs.

Group CEO Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum said: "Strong profitability enables us to make the investments necessary for our continued success. We're investing billions of dollars to bring new products and services to the market for our customers, to implement advanced technologies and other innovation projects to drive growth. We expect customer demand to remain strong for the rest of 2024-2025 and we look forward to increasing our capacity to grow revenues as new aircraft join the Emirates fleet."

The Dubai-based carrier has ten Airbus A350-900s on order.

(Photo Emirates)

Emirates’ game-changer

As Airliner World went to press, Emirates took delivery of its first Airbus A350. The next-generation widebody, A6-EXA (c/n 684), was handed over on November 25 and touched down in Dubai the following day. Xray Alpha first flew on September 25 and is one of ten examples ordered by the airline. Each will be configured in a three-class layout, offering 32 business, 21 premium economy and 259 economy seats V1IMAGES.COM/CLEMENT ALLOING

Ethiopian lands **first A350**

ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES welcomed Africa’s first Airbus A350-1000 in a grand ceremony attended by government officials, ambassadors, diplomats and representatives from Airbus. It landed at Addis Ababa/Bole International on November 5, after a 6.5-hour ferry flight from Toulouse, and received the traditional water cannon salute.

Mesfin Tasew, Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO, said: “We are thrilled to welcome the Airbus A350-1000 to our fleet, solidifying our position as leaders in aviation technology. This aircraft embodies cutting-edge advancements, offering superior passenger comfort, enhanced fuel efficiency and reduced environmental impact. Together, we are pioneering a sustainable future for aviation in Africa.”

Ethiopian
1st A350-1000

Powered by two Rolls-Royce Trent XWB engines, ET-BAW (c/n 691) wears ‘1st A350-1000 in Africa’ stickers beside the front doors and is configured in a two-class layout, with 46 business and 349 economy seats. It is the first of four examples ordered by Africa’s biggest airline in 2022. The second, ET-BAX (c/n 702), has the same configuration and completed its first flight on November 19. It is due to arrive before the end of 2024, with the two remaining examples due for delivery in early 2025. The A350-1000 forms part of the airline’s Vision 2035 programme, as it plans to increase its current fleet of 134 aircraft to 270 by 2035. (Photo Airbus/Hervé Goussé)

A321neos for Riyadh Air

RIYADH AIR has placed a firm order for 60 Airbus A321neos, to be delivered from the second half of 2026 and running until 2030. Airline CEO Tony Douglas commented: “This investment will not only enable us to support economic growth in the aviation industry, it will ensure Riyadh Air operates one of the most fuel efficient fleets.” The airline is likely to take two variants for mission reasons, as he noted: “We are not quite in the configuration window yet, so whether we elect to take A321neo LR version or the XLR variant will be driven by our network.”

Christian Scherer, CEO of Commercial Aircraft at Airbus, said: “We are proud to welcome Riyadh Air as a new Airbus customer and partner. The latest generation A321neo aircraft will bring exceptional efficiency to the airline’s operations, concrete contributions to its decarbonisation goals and comfort to its passengers.”

RIYADH AIR
طيران الرياض
PIF
AIRBUS
PIF

The airline intends to make a decision in the first half of 2025 on another widebody order, as it ponders a deal for the Airbus A350-1000 or Boeing 777X to accompany its 39 787-9 Dreamliners on firm order. The airline said it needs to receive the first three 787s before it can begin revenue flights. (Photo Riyadh Air)

in brief

Riyadh-based low-cost carrier, **flynas** has launched thrice-weekly flights between Madinah/Prince Mohammad bin Abdulaziz and Cairo/Sphinx. The airline, which operates an all-Airbus fleet of 57 Airbus A320s and four A330s, already serves Cairo International Airport from Riyadh and Jeddah. From January 8, it will also launch thrice-weekly services from Riyadh to Entebbe in Uganda and between Jeddah and Djibouti.

Beginning in March 2025, **Royal Jordanian Airlines** will inaugurate a new transatlantic service to Washington/Dulles. Operating from Amman/Queen Alia, the twice-weekly link will be flown by the flag carrier’s fleet of seven Boeing 787-8 Dreamliners. Washington will become the airline’s fourth US gateway after New York/JFK, Chicago/O’Hare and Detroit/Metropolitan.

TAAG Angola Airlines began the transfer of its commercial passenger operations from Luanda/Quatro de Fevereiro International Airport to the new Luanda/Dr António Agostinho Neto International on November 10. The first operational route from the new facility was a four-times daily domestic service to Cabinda, utilising its fleet of six De Havilland Canada Dash 8-400s. During December, routes to Dundo, Saurimo, Luena and Soyo were moved to the new facility, which opened in December 2023. Its remaining services will be relocated during the first quarter of 2025.

Tripoli/Mitiga will welcome a new service from **ITA Airways** on January 12, when it commences twice-weekly operations from Rome/Fiumicino. The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) has an active conflict-zone information bulletin, valid until the end of April 2025, advising carriers not to fly within Libyan airspace. Although much of the country is considered risky for air transport, EASA makes an exception for coastal airports if approaches are made over the Mediterranean Sea, in full co-ordination with local authorities and air traffic control, and based on a robust risk assessment.

Proflight Zambia has begun twice-weekly direct flights between Livingstone and Cape Town. Services between Lusaka and Cape Town will now route via Livingstone, the closest airport to the Victoria Falls, with a 30-minute technical stop. It has also signed its first interline ticketing agreement with a European airline, allowing Turkish Airlines to issue tickets connecting its passengers seamlessly to Proflight’s domestic and regional routes across Zambia and South Africa.

Spirit in the sky

SPIRIT AIRLINES filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection on November 18, from which it hopes to emerge in the first quarter of 2025. The airline said it will operate as normal during what it calls a "streamlined" restructuring process. It has secured backstopped commitments for a $350m equity investment, plus $300m in debtor-in-possession financing, from existing bondholders; and will complete a deleveraging transaction to equitise $795m of funded debt. Ted Christie, CEO, said: "I am pleased we have reached an agreement with a supermajority of both our loyalty and convertible bondholders on a comprehensive recapitalisation of the company, which is a strong vote of confidence in Spirit and our long-term plan."

The airline had missed its November 12 deadline for filing a report on its third-quarter financial results with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). The news comes after *The Wall Street Journal* reported recently revived talks with Frontier Airlines, regarding a merger, had collapsed.

The July issue of *Airliner World* reported a $207.3m first quarter operating loss the airline said was "in line with expectations". After the proposed merger with JetBlue fell apart in March 2024, it implemented a standalone plan. At the end of October the troubled carrier announced it would furlough another 330 pilots this January. Plans for new Airbus aircraft were deferred last August, when it revealed its intention to furlough 240 pilots. More recently, Spirit agreed to sell 23 of its five to ten-year-old Airbus A320 aircraft to GA Telesis, boosting the bank balance by about $225m. With fewer active staff, unprofitable routes are being withdrawn from the network as part of a cost reduction plan saving $80m during 2025. (Photo Spirit Airlines)

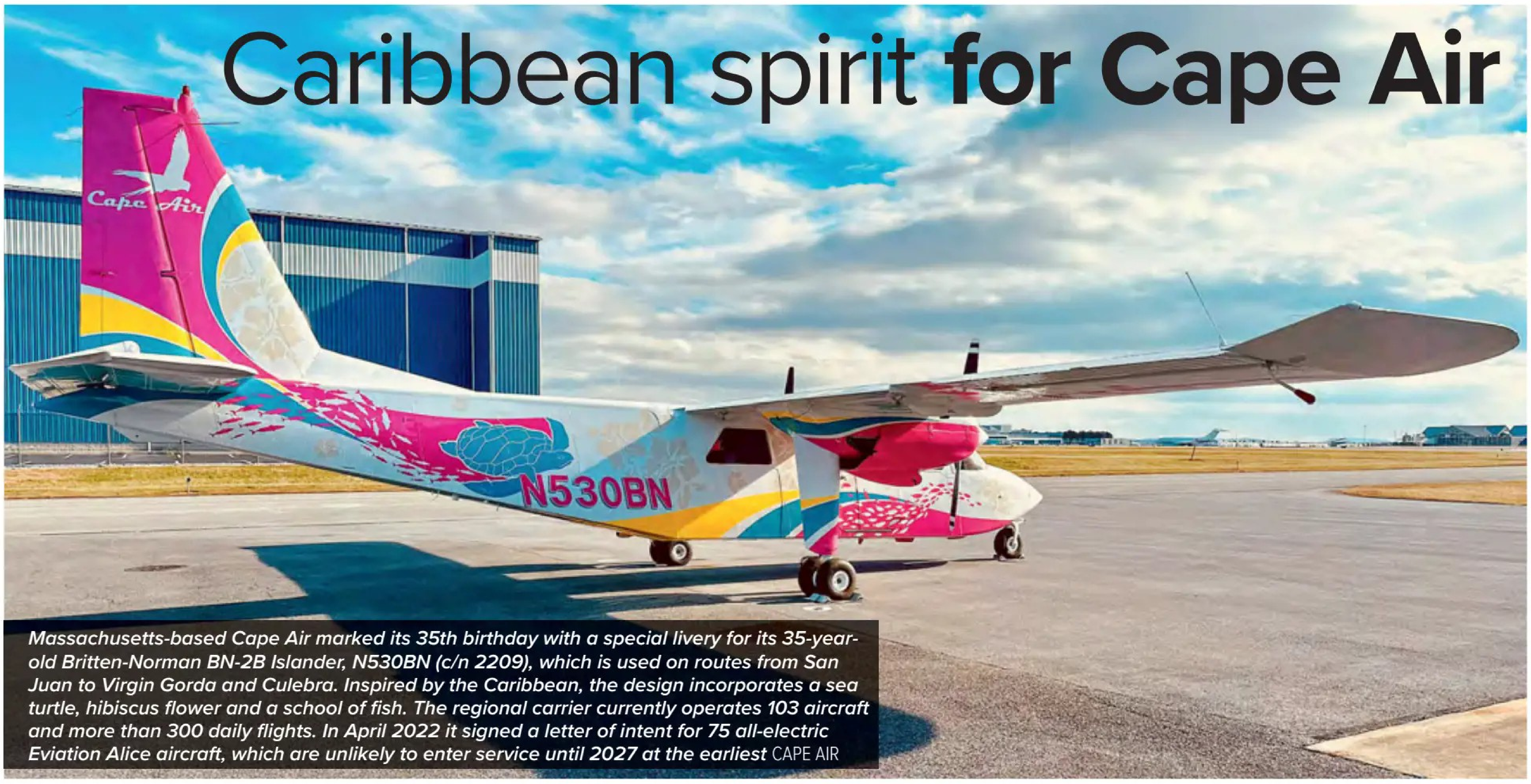
LATAM lands Dreamliner deal

LATAM AIRLINES Group has purchased ten new Boeing 787 Dreamliners with an option for five additional aircraft, positioning it as the largest operator of the type in Latin America. It currently flies ten 787-8s and 27 787-9s, and expects its total of 37 airframes to rise to 52 by the end of the decade. Ramiro Alfonsín, CFO of LATAM Airlines Group, said: "This order will enable the group to continue its international growth, with deliveries committed from 2025 until the end of the decade." Mike Wilson, Boeing vice president of commercial sales for Latin America and the Caribbean, added: "We appreciate LATAM's continued confidence in the 787 Dreamliner family to further expand its international network from hubs in Santiago, São Paulo and Lima."

The airline has embarked on an ambitious growth strategy, including commitments for more than 120 new aircraft up to 2030. It has also allocated almost $7m for a new 787 hangar, expected to begin operations in September 2025. Construction of the new structure began in November at its São Carlos MRO facility, 150 miles northwest of São Paulo.

Group profit during the third quarter of 2024 rose to $301m, up 25% from the same period last year. Currently the largest aviation group in South America, it carries almost 220,000 passengers daily, on 1,600 flights, serving 164 destinations across 31 countries. It also holds the unique position of being the only airline in the region to connect South America with North America, Europe, Oceania and Africa, boosted by commercial agreements with 57 airlines, and codeshare deals with 27 others. (Photo Boeing)

Caribbean spirit for Cape Air



Massachusetts-based Cape Air marked its 35th birthday with a special livery for its 35-year-old Britten-Norman BN-2B Islander, N530BN (c/n 2209), which is used on routes from San Juan to Virgin Gorda and Culebra. Inspired by the Caribbean, the design incorporates a sea turtle, hibiscus flower and a school of fish. The regional carrier currently operates 103 aircraft and more than 300 daily flights. In April 2022 it signed a letter of intent for 75 all-electric Eviation Alice aircraft, which are unlikely to enter service until 2027 at the earliest CAPE AIR

GOL emerging from Chapter 11

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GOL

BRAZILIAN CARRIER GOL is hoping to exit Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection by the end of April, having entered it in the early part of 2024. The airline has reached a debt for equity agreement with majority shareholder Abra Group, which will wipe $2.55bn of debt from the carrier's books and see Abra attain around $950m in additional GOL equity. The airline also anticipates raising up to $1.85bn of new capital in the form of an exit facility to repay its debtor-in-possession financing facility (DIP loan), of which up to $330m will come in the form of new equity. The reorganisation plan is likely to be submitted to the court before the end of 2024.

"With this agreement we have the majority of the key terms of the restructuring plan defined," said Celso Ferrer, GOL CEO. "Despite the challenges we have faced, this process is positive for GOL's history, addressing all the necessary points to support our sustainable growth in the coming years."

The carrier made an operating profit of $500,000 during the third quarter, down from $142m a year ago. It has also been renegotiating leasing deals for aircraft and engines. GOL operates an all-Boeing fleet of 133 aircraft, comprising 12 737-700s, 72 737-800s and 49 737 MAX 8s. (Photo Boeing)

ATR's Canadian debut

RISE AIR, the Canadian regional carrier based in Saskatoon, is to become the country's launch customer for the 68-seat ATR 72-600 after signing an agreement for three airframes – the largest investment in its 69-year history. The first aircraft will be delivered by the end of 2025 with the other two arriving on lease during 2026. Derek Nice, president and CEO at Rise Air, said: "We are thrilled to be introducing the ATR 72-600 to Canada, bringing our customers more comfortable, more reliable air service at remote work sites and communities across the north. The [aircraft's] outstanding performance and low environmental footprint make it the perfect choice for operating in the diverse and challenging conditions where we operate. We look forward to continuing to enhance regional connectivity and support economic growth in the areas we serve."

The airline currently operates 15 aircraft including five ATR 42s, seven de Havilland Canada DHC-6 Twin Otters and three Saab 340s, connecting eight airports across Saskatchewan. The turboprops will be configured to seat 68 passengers and powered by two Pratt & Whitney Canada PW127XT engines.

Nathalie Tarnaud Laude, CEO of ATR, added: "We are delighted to support Rise Air as they introduce the first ATR 72-600 in Canada, marking a double milestone as it also represents the debut of the -600 series in the country. This agreement not only reinforces the strength of our aircraft in the regional market but also demonstrates the growing interest in the ATR -600 series for markets like Canada." (Photo ATR)

Optimism at Azul

AZUL BRAZILIAN Airlines bolstered its profitability and revenues as it struck a positive chord for the rest of this year and beyond. The low-cost carrier increased operating profit by 7% to just over R1bn ($172m) in the third quarter and made a net profit of R360m ($62.1m) – a significant improvement on losses of almost R1.3bn ($224m) at the same time in 2023. It has made deals with OEMs, lessors and bondholders to improve the balance sheet, which it called "mutually-beneficial cash flow improvements", and increased revenues 4% to R5.1bn ($880m) in the third quarter. Azul CEO John Rodgerson said: "We started to see signs of recovery in bookings and revenue and now you can see clearly we are back on a normal revenue trajectory, with RASK [revenue per available seat kilometre] up 12% on the second quarter."

The boost came despite the closure of Porto Alegre/Salgado Filho airport during the third quarter due to floods in southern Brazil. October's partial reopening of the airport provided a further reason for the carrier's optimism. "In terms of capacity growth we are looking at about 10% next year," added chief revenue officer, Abhi Shah. "It is going to be lower than that on the domestic side and it's going to be higher than that on the international side, because of the four widebodies we received this year." The airline currently has 143 aircraft in active service including 32 ATR 72-600s, 48 Airbus A320neos, six A321neos, five A330-200s, three A330-900s, two Boeing 737-400s, 27 Embraer E195s, and 20 E195-E2s. (Photo Airbus/A Domenjou)

in brief

Canadian low-cost carrier **Flair Airlines** has launched an 'on-time' guarantee, which it said is "raising the bar in Canadian aviation". Passengers aged 18 and over who book through the carrier's website will now receive a CAN$60 (£34) travel e-voucher for flights arriving more than 60 minutes late, or flights cancelled within 72 hours of departure. The airline achieved an 83.4% 'on-time' rating in September and 82% in October.

Minneapolis-based **Sun Country Airlines** expects to take delivery of another eight Boeing 737-800BCFs during 2025, which will increase its fleet of 737 freighters to 20 examples. It recently signed an amended contract to fly on behalf of e-commerce giant Amazon, through to 2030 with options to extend to 2037. The hybrid low-cost carrier recently reported its ninth successive profitable quarter.

Air Canada has signed an agreement with Neste to purchase 77.6 million litres of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), contributing 1% of the airline's estimated jet fuel use in 2025. The Finnish fuel producer will deliver the SAF to the Vancouver marine terminal. Elsewhere, the carrier is extending its intermodal strategy across Europe and into Asia, allowing customers to book connecting rail or bus segments on a single itinerary, via its partnership with AccesRail.

Ohio-based **Air Transport Services Group** (ATSG) has signed an agreement allowing it to be purchased by New York investment firm, Stonepeak. The $3.1bn cash deal, which requires shareholder approval and would make ATSG a private company, is likely to close in the first half of 2025. The air cargo and aircraft leasing specialist operates a fleet of 123 aircraft, comprising six Airbus A321-200s, a single A330-200, five A330-300s, four Boeing 757-200s, 18 767-200s, 86 767-300s and three 777-200s.

American Airlines has launched what it calls its "largest ever schedule to Italy" in 2025 after an uplift in schedules to the European country from the US. The inaugural Dallas/Fort Worth to Venice/Marco Polo service begins on June 5, with operations to Rome from Miami and Philadelphia expanded, and it will also become the only airline flying non-stop from Chicago to Naples. Flights will be operated by a mix of Boeing 787 Dreamliners and 777-200s.

Vistara's final flight

AFTER ALMOST ten years of operations, Indian carrier Vistara flew its final flight ahead of its merger with Air India. The last domestic service, flight UK986, was between Mumbai and Delhi, operated by one of the carrier's Airbus A320s. Meanwhile, its final international sortie, flight UK115, departed Delhi bound for Singapore, operated by an Airbus A321. From November 12, all Vistara flights were officially operated under the Air India banner using the flight code AI 2XXX.

The flag carrier stationed help desks at India's major airports in a bid to make the transition as smooth as possible for customers. More than 4.5 million Club Vistara loyalty members were transferred to Air India's redesigned Maharaja Club, along with around 270,000 passenger bookings. The merger sees the flag carrier's network expand to over 90 domestic and international destinations, with 312 routes, 5,600 weekly flights, all operated by a fleet of 208 aircraft.

Campbell Wilson, CEO of Air India, said the merger was a "significant milestone" in the airline's history, completing "the consolidation and restructuring phase of the Air India Group's post-privatisation transformation journey". He went on to thank his staff for their hard work in making the transition as seamless as possible and reaffirmed the airline's commitment to "creating a world-class global airline with an Indian heart".

Vinod Kannan, Vistara's CEO, added: "Thank you to our 75 million passengers for your support, patronage and touching testimonials. I am humbled and honoured to have been part of this team. Onwards and upwards towards our new chapter. The new feeling has a new home."

Vistara, a joint venture between Singapore Airlines and Tata Group, launched domestic flights in January 2015 and international services four years later. The airline grew to operate a fleet of 70 aircraft, including seven Boeing 787-9s for its long-haul services to London/Heathrow and Paris/Charles de Gaulle, 53 Airbus A320neos and ten A321neos.

The airline was known for its high levels of service and had built a loyal customer base. Vistara was fully integrated into Air India after the Tata Group purchased the flag carrier in January 2022. In October this year, the group also merged AirAsia India into the Air India Express brand. As part of the deal, Singapore Airlines has gained a 25% stake in the Indian flag carrier. (Photo Vistara)

Government lifeline for Rex

REGIONAL EXPRESS Airlines (Rex) has been granted an AU$80m lifeline by the Australian government to keep the beleaguered carrier flying. Administrators are also looking to extend its voluntary administration process until the end of June 2025 while extending its customer flight booking guarantee. Transport minister Catherine King and workplace minister Murray Wyatt announced the move on November 12.

King said the announcement was "another demonstration of our commitment to maintaining regional aviation access" while "recognising the important role that Rex plays in regional communities across Australia".

Administrator Ernst & Young Australia (EYA) has been overseeing the airline's administration process and plans to stabilise and maintain essential regional services carried out by the carrier's Saab 340 fleet. Sam Freeman, EYA's turnaround and restructuring strategy leader, said the new investment will be used to enact a business improvement programme to secure Rex's future and increase the size of the airline's operational fleet.

A deal has also been reached to sell the Pel-Air ambulance business to Helicorp Pty, part of logistics firm Toll Aviation, for AU$47m. The proceeds will be used to repay secured debt. This is in addition to the sale of a Boeing 737-700/-800 flight simulator and shares in charter carrier and aviation services provider National Jet Express.

The airline was placed into voluntary administration in July 2024, bringing an end to its Boeing 737 jet operations between the country's capital cities. Hundreds of jobs were lost, but the Australian government has now agreed to grant former employees access to the Fair Entitlements Guarantee, ensuring that the extended voluntary administration process does not delay their entitlement access.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission recently published its latest domestic airline competition report. It found that since Rex's jet operation demise, the average airfare on major routes between the country's capitals increased by more than 13%. The number of seats fell by 6% while passenger demand has remained the same. You can read more about the issues facing Australian aviation from page 38. (Photo Rex/TasPorts)

Double cabin upgrade delight

THAI AIRWAYS International and Singapore Airlines (SIA) separately announced a cabin retrofit programme for their fleets of Boeing 777-300ERs and Airbus A350-900s, respectively.

The Thai flag carrier is set to overhaul all classes in 14 of its 17-strong fleet of 777s with a new cabin product, including the addition of a premium economy offering and a new in-flight entertainment system. The news comes after the airline began a cabin retrofit programme for its fleet of 20 Airbus A320ceo aircraft, inherited following the integration of its low-cost subsidiary Thai Smile. The upgrade, being carried out by Airbus, will see the installation of reclining business class seats.

SINGAPORE AIRLINES

Thai Airways also revealed that it will partner with Saudi Arabian satellite service provider Neo Space Group to provide in-flight connectivity solutions for its 777 fleet and incoming A321neos. The airline plans to offer complimentary Wi-Fi streaming to its premium class passengers and Royal Orchid Plus members.

Meanwhile, Changi Airport-based Singapore Airlines has said it will invest $1.1bn in a multi-year programme to upgrade its fleet of 41 A350-900s. The retrofit will be carried out on its standard -900s and its -900ULRs used on its ultra-long-haul services to the US. The latter will see the installation of four first-class seats, while both will receive a new business class cabin. Premium economy and economy cabins will also receive a refresh.

The upgrade means its 34 -900s will be reconfigured with 42 business-class seats, 24 premium economy seats and 192 economy seats. In addition to the four new first-class seats, the -900ULRs will feature 70 business-class seats and 58 premium economy seats.

The airline's SIA Engineering will carry out the work in-house. The first retrofitted aircraft is expected to re-enter service in the second quarter of 2026, and the airline hopes to have all work completed by the end of 2030. (Photo Key-Martin Needham)

Vietnam's fleet boost

VIETNAM AIRLINES CEO Le Hong Ha has revealed that the airline will issue a request for proposals (RFP) for approximately 50 narrowbody jets in the first half of 2025 in a bid to expand its fleet to 170 aircraft by 2035. The airline chief was speaking at the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA) event in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei.

The airline had agreed a non-binding deal to buy up to 50 Boeing 737 MAX jets in September 2023. Hong Ha said this potential deal was still on the table – and the US aircraft maker "has a very good offer" – but any new RFP would be open to all aircraft manufacturers.

COMAC is also a potential suitor with its C919. The Chinese manufacturer has recently been targeting Vietnam as a new customer, with the country's state news agency reporting that the Vietnamese prime minister Pham Minh Chinh had met with a senior COMAC official in early November. The C919 has already attracted orders from several Chinese airlines, including Air China, China Southern and China Eastern.

Vietnam Airlines' narrowbody fleet currently comprises just Airbus narrowbodies, including A321ceos and A321neos. On July 7, the flag carrier took delivery of its first A320neo, VN-A513 (c/n 12148). The aircraft is configured with 182 seats in a two-class layout, with eight in business and 174 in economy class.

Hong Ha added that an additional tender for another 50 aircraft, comprising both narrowbody and widebody jets, will also be released at a later date. (Photo Airbus)

Vietnam Airlines
NO GRAB

Hainan's COMAC order switch

Urumqi Air 乌鲁木齐航空

THE OWNER of Urumqi Air, Hainan Airlines, has amended an order with Chinese aircraft manufacturer COMAC for 30 C919s. Instead, the low-cost airline will now receive 40 C909s – recently rebranded from the ARJ21-700.

The deal for the latter, worth $1.5bn at list prices, was disclosed on November 11 in a stock market statement and is awaiting shareholder approval. Deliveries are expected to run from 2025 to 2032.

Hainan Airlines group first announced a commitment with COMAC for 100 aircraft in 2023, comprising 60 C919s and 40 C909s for subsidiaries Urumqi Air and Suparna Airlines. The carrier confirmed the deal on November 12. However, whether this new C909 deal is part of the original order or a new one is still being determined. Hainan added that the 30 C919s would be transferred to other subsidiaries within the airline group and that the switch had not created a breach of contract.

Xinjiang-based Urumqi Air was established in 2014 and currently operates a fleet of 18 Boeing 737-800s. The introduction of the C909 will align with China's bid to promote and use domestically-produced aircraft.

The formal rebranding of the ARJ21-700 to the C909 was announced at the China International Aviation & Aerospace Exhibition, held at Zhuhai Jinwan Airport in November. The aircraft now joins COMAC's other types, the narrowbody C919 and the upcoming widebody, the C929. To date, 146 examples of the C909 have been delivered to customers, including Indonesia's TransNusa Airlines. (Photo Urumqi Airlines)

AAPA adds Lion Air

LION AIR has become the first low-cost carrier to enter the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA). The airline joins 15 other full-service legacy members including Air Astana, Air India, Air Japan, Bangkok Airways, Royal Brunei Airlines and Vietnam Airlines.

Based in Jakarta, Indonesia, Lion Air was founded in 1999 and with its subsidiaries – Wings Air, Batik Air, Super Air Jet, Batik Air Malaysia and Thai Lion Air – has since grown to become the largest budget carrier in Southeast Asia.

Rudy Lumingkewas, president director of Lion Air, said the airline was "excited to be a member of AAPA". He continued: "With its excellent connectivity across Indonesia and a growing network of international destinations, Lion Air is committed to expanding accessibility to various regions in Indonesia, and to playing a key role in supporting the country's economic and social development. Lion Air is looking forward to working with other AAPA members and playing its part in the continued success of the Asia Pacific air transport sector."

The AAPA was established as the Orient Airlines Association in 1966. Now based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the primary role of the not-for-profit group is to "serve as a common forum for the articulation of views on matters and issues of common interest to the Asia Pacific aviation industry, to foster close co-operation with other relevant stakeholders and to encourage the successful evolution of the travel and tourism industry as a key contributor to economic, social and cultural development." (Photo Jessica Oyanagi/Boeing)

in brief

The 11-year-old alliance between Hong Kong's **Cathay Pacific** and **Air New Zealand** has been granted a five-year extension by the New Zealand regulator. According to a joint statement from the two airlines, the alliance has contributed to boosting traffic between the two nations. During the peak season, up to 18 weekly return services are offered by the pair between New Zealand and Hong Kong. As part of the joint venture, frequent flyers enjoy reciprocal mileage earning and redemptions, plus lounge and baggage status benefits.

Troubled Indian low-cost carrier **SpiceJet** has announced that it is to take ownership of 13 De Havilland Canada Dash 8s. The airline will pay $22.5m in order to settle a $90.8m dispute that includes the 13 turboprops, financed by Export Development Canada. The agreement is expected to reduce operational costs by eliminating monthly lease payments. SpiceJet said the aircraft will be used to expand its regional operations and enhance connectivity across key routes.

Hopes of reviving **Jet Airways** have been dashed after India's supreme court ordered the liquidation of the carrier under the insolvency and bankruptcy code. The airline ceased operations in April 2019 and has since been locked in an intense legal battle in an attempt to return the airline to the skies through the corporate insolvency process. Courts had approved a restructuring plan in 2021. However, the latest ruling claimed the airline's owners Jalan-Kalrock Consortium had failed to put this plan into action. (Photo Airbus/Hervé Goussé)

JET AIRWAYS

Low-cost Chinese regional carrier **Colorful Guizhou Airlines** has announced a firm order for 20 COMAC C909s, with options on a further ten. The deal for the Chinese regional jet was disclosed at the 2024 China International Aviation & Aerospace Exhibition in Zhuhai. No delivery timeframe or financial details have been given about the deal. The airline currently operates a fleet of ten Airbus A320neos and nine Embraer E190s. The C909 was formerly known as the ARJ21.

ATR abandons STOL

FRANCO-ITALIAN MANUFACTURER ATR has ended its plans to develop a short take-off and landing (STOL) variant of the ATR 42-600 "following an extensive market review and in light of lingering tensions on its supply chain". The airframer added that the "comprehensive review of market conditions, technological advancements and future projections shows a reduced addressable market for the variant compared to the initial forecast."

With just 21 examples signed for, the STOL order book failed to gain much momentum since its launch in 2019. Southeast Asian airport development and runway extensions in recent years have significantly decreased the number of airports the airframer anticipated requiring STOL-capable aircraft, saying "this trend is mirrored in other key target markets."

ATR CEO Nathalie Tarnaud Laude said the decision to end the project "reflects our dedication to operational efficiency and long-term sustainability" and will "enable ATR to shift efforts towards enhancing existing product lines, advancing technological innovation and addressing emerging market demands more efficiently."

The STOL variant initially had a certification target of 2022 and, after a break enforced by a design reconfiguration, flight testing resumed in December 2023, with hopes to have the variant certificated by June 2024. Laude added: "We are now entering the next phase of growth and improvement, where we will focus on further investing in the competitiveness of our market-leading products, the ATR 42-600 and 72-600. Delivering strong value propositions to regional airlines has always been central to our success." (Photo ATR)

Boeing solution **for ASG**

AVIA SOLUTIONS Group (ASG) has made its first direct purchase with Boeing after ordering 40 737 MAXs with 40 options, scheduled for delivery from 2030. The Dublin-based aircraft, crew, maintenance and insurance (ACMI) provider says the deal is part of its "ongoing strategy of bolstering its capacity to meet the continued strong demand from airlines globally for additional aircraft during peak seasons."

ASG holds a mixed fleet of 220 aircraft and operates subsidiary airlines that include Ascend Airways (UK), Skytrans (Australia), Avion Express (Lithuania), SmartLynx Airlines (Latvia), AirExplore (Slovakia) and BBN Airlines (Indonesia), and operates in more than 60 countries.

Group chairman Gediminas Ziemelis said: "As the world's largest ACMI provider, carrying more than 35 million passengers annually for our clients, we have committed to a strategic approach of expanding our capacity to meet our customers' seasonal needs, and our first order with Boeing is a key pillar of this. This is a proud moment for all of us and is testament to the fact that [the] Group is now entering a clear phase of sustained growth. These 737 MAXs will enhance the fleets of our airlines, giving customers both operational flexibility and greater fuel efficiency."

Brad McMullen, SVP of commercial sales and marketing at Boeing, added: "ACMI providers such as ASG offer important, flexible capacity to meet the dynamic demand in our industry and we are honoured [it] has selected Boeing airplanes to help meet that demand from its customers." (Photo Avia Solutions Group)

Boeing Deliveries

British Airways accepted delivery of Boeing 787-10 Dreamliner, G-ZBLK (c/n 60632) on October 22. Configured to carry 256 passengers in a four-class layout, it entered revenue service on October 26 AVIATION IMAGE NETWORK/SIMON GREGORY

Boeing delivered the following aircraft in October:

737 MAX	9	Akasa Air; China Eastern Airlines; Ryanair (2); Southwest Airlines; SunExpress Airlines; United Airlines; Xiamen Airlines (2)
767-300F	1	FedEx Express
787-9	1	China Eastern Airlines
787-10	3	Air Lease Corporation (2); British Airways
Total	14	
Annual total to date	294	

Airbus Deliveries

Air France accepted delivery of Airbus A220-300, F-HPNM (c/n 55299) on October 18. Configured to carry 148 passengers in a single class cabin, it is one of 40 in the airline's fleet and one of 28 in active service AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/SIMON WILLSON

Airbus delivered the following aircraft in October:

A220-100	1	Air Lease Corporation [ITA Airways]
A220-300	7	Air Lease Corporation; Breeze Airways (2); Air France (2); Air Lease Corporation [ITA Airways]; Delta Air Lines
A319neo	2	China Southern Airlines; Tibet Airlines
A320neo	14	Avolon [Transavia] (2); AerCap [Aegean Airlines]; IndiGo (3); Malta Medair [KM Malta Airlines]; China Eastern Airlines; easyJet; BOC Aviation [Nouvelair]; SMBC Aviation Capital [Sky Airline}; Macquarie AirFinance [Avianca]; China Express Airlines [Huaxia Airlines]; Accipitier [Air Cairo]
A321neo	32	Qantas Airways [Jetstar Airways] (2); Frontier Airlines (2); SMBC Aviation Capital [Turkish Airlines]; Jet2.com; China Southern Airlines; Delta Air Lines (3); Xiamen Airlines; Wizz Air; Air Lease Corporation [Condor]; Cebu Pacific (2); VietJet Air (2); Cathay Pacific; easyJet (3); Viva Aerobus; China Eastern Airlines (2); Volaris; Iberia; IndiGo; AerCap [Turkish Airlines]; ICBC Leasing (Loong Air); Pegasus Airlines; Juneyao Air; United Airlines
A330-900	3	NAS Aviation Services [Corsair]; Virgin Atlantic Airways; Delta Air Lines
A350-900	1	Lufthansa
A350-1000	1	Japan Airlines
Total	61	
Annual total to date	558	

Cargo growth booms

AS THE cargo market exceeds pre-pandemic levels, Boeing forecasts continued long-term growth, with traffic increasing by an average of 4% over the next 20 years. The projections appear in the 2024 World Air Cargo Forecast (WACF), the manufacturer's biennial overview and long-term outlook for the air cargo industry.

With a forecast need for 1,005 new production and 1,840 converted aircraft, the global freighter fleet is predicted to grow from 2,340 aircraft in 2023 to 3,900 by 2043. Almost half of production is expected to replace existing airframes, although many older freighters will remain in service.

Two-thirds of global deliveries are expected to be in the Asia-Pacific and North America regions, for 980 and 955 aircraft respectively. The widebody market is likely to almost double, driven by growth in Asian markets, while India's domestic air cargo market will almost quadruple. Express carriers are poised to grow faster than the industry average, from 18% to 25% of the market, due to an increasing role in e-commerce distribution and the expansion of express networks in emerging markets.

Darren Hulst, VP of commercial marketing at Boeing, said: "As the quickest and most reliable way to move goods, air cargo's sustained growth has returned the industry to its long-term trend. There will be many drivers for continued freighter demand over the next 20 years, including expansion of emerging markets and global growth in manufacturing and e-commerce." (Photo Boeing)

Green SAF flight paths

THE CONCENTRATION of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) use on a small number of dense long-haul routes would accelerate development of commercial supply chains, a new research paper from the American University of Sharjah and Heriot-Watt University has concluded.

It stated that 'green flight paths' between key global locations with high passenger volumes, such as London-Dubai, could help to fast-track fully decarbonised aviation. London/Heathrow is already a world leader in SAF and is working towards a target of incorporating 11% of SAF into its overall fuel usage by 2030.

Professor John Andresen, associate director of the Research Centre for Carbon Solutions at Heriot-Watt University, said: "The concept of green flight paths is inspired by green shipping corridors, which are paving the way for net-zero shipping."

The research said that "targeting a small number of high-volume, long-haul routes would demonstrate the economic viability of the green flight path model because it would speed up the development of commercially viable SAF supply chains."

Professor Steve Griffiths, vice-chancellor for research at the American University of Sharjah, said: "The UAE and UK are both highly dependent on long-haul flights, so have a compelling opportunity to lead the establishment of green flight paths to demonstrate and deploy sustainable aviation fuels. Establishing green flight paths has the potential to not only drive decarbonisation of the aviation sector, but also lead to international co-operation for the development of SAF and the related clean technologies needed to achieve net-zero by 2050 on a global scale." (Photo Delta Air Lines)

SkyCourier reaches Marshall Islands

TEXTRON AVIATION has announced an order for two passenger variants of its twin-engine, large-utility turboprop, the Cessna 408 SkyCourier. The aircraft will support travel throughout the communities for Air Marshall Islands, a commercially operated airline owned by the government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Based in Majuro, the airline currently operates a pair of 34-year-old De Havilland Canada Dash 8s.

Captain Albon Jelke, GM and CEO of Air Marshall Islands, said: "This exciting development is a major milestone in our efforts to modernise our aircraft, allowing us to provide more reliable and efficient flights across the Marshall Islands. Our new SkyCouriers are perfectly designed to reach the remote atolls and islands, ensuring that essential air services are accessible to both our local communities and visitors."

Lannie O'Bannion, senior VP for global sales and flight operations at Textron Aviation, added: "The Cessna SkyCourier is an excellent choice to support the mission of [the airline]. With its low operating costs and maximum cabin flexibility, [it is] a real game-changer in regional connectivity." (Photo Textron Aviation)

Vertical VX4 untethered

VERTICAL AEROSPACE has seen its latest full-scale VX4 prototype achieve piloted, untethered vertical take-off and landing for the first time as phase two of its flight test programme began. The second of four testing segments follows the UK Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) expansion of the manufacturer's permit to fly.

Powered by battery packs delivering up to 1.4MW of peak power, the prototype surpassed expectations in hover performance, control and stability. Testing will now progress to low-speed manoeuvres, using lift generated by the propellers, at its flight test centre at Cotswold Airport. Thrust borne flights are designed to assess the aircraft's stability, battery efficiency, control characteristics, aerodynamics, structural and dynamic loads and performance across different speeds, enabling further assessment of how the VX4 behaves under real-world conditions.

Chief test pilot Simon Davies said: "The aircraft performed absolutely brilliantly and was really stable in the hover. Everything on the aircraft worked perfectly – no surprises, nice and boring – a great test flight."

Vertical will now progress through phase two while working with the CAA to extend its permit to fly and move onto phase three, wing borne flight tests. Stuart Simpson, CEO of Vertical Aerospace, added: "It's great to see the VX4 throw off the tethers and move to the next phase of our piloted test flight programme. We now enter a realm that very few companies in the world have achieved." (Photo Vertical Aerospace)

Doncaster's new dawn

HAVING SAT empty since its closure in November 2022, Doncaster Sheffield could reopen its doors as soon as spring 2026, with an as-yet-unnamed bidder currently engaged in what the City of Doncaster Council describes as "legal and contract confirmation stages".

Although "details of the bidder will remain confidential until further into the process as commercial negotiations are ongoing", the council expects the current processes to be completed before Christmas this year; paving the way for the first commercial flights in 2026.

In order to assist with these ongoing commercial negotiations, as well as help "prepare timely activity on site", the City of Doncaster Council received £3m from the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority on November 12. South Yorkshire's Mayor, Oliver Coppard, said: "I remain completely committed to reopening Doncaster Sheffield Airport and creating a world leading sustainable aviation hub." He noted "a huge potential to play a leading role in the economic regeneration of South Yorkshire".

Although Doncaster's mayor Ros Jones noted that she appreciated many people will want to know who the successful bidder is, she cautioned that these discussions must remain "on a strictly confidential basis" – at least for the time being. "I know our residents and businesses are keen for the airport to reopen and would want that to happen yesterday, but please rest assured we are working as hard as possible to get the airport reopened," she added.

The council concluded that it is also awaiting news on the reinstatement of the airport's airspace, something currently under consideration by the CAA.

The facility closed in November 2022, with previous operators, the Peel Group, citing a lack of profitability. However, the City of Doncaster Council has fought tirelessly in its campaign to reopen the facility, signing a 125-year lease on the site with landowners Peel and remain confident in the airport's viability. (Photo Thomas Haynes)

Charge increase for Changi

SINGAPORE/CHANGI HAS announced a $2.23bn investment on several infrastructure upgrades over the next six years to develop its position as a global hub. The airport said the work will allow it to "remain competitive and meet rising demand for air travel before Terminal 5 is operational in the mid-2030s."

The Changi Airport Group (CAG) has said that the upgrades will include improvements to baggage handling, check-in, and immigration areas in Terminals 1 to 4 and a "rejuvenation" of the Skytrain subsystem, which connects the terminal buildings.

Work will also be carried out to allow the facility to accommodate Boeing's new 777X, with upgrades to taxiways, aircraft parking stands and gate areas. CAG said that the airport will have 39 contact stands capable of handling the new US-built widebody airliner, which is expected to enter service in 2026. The airport's largest carrier, Singapore Airlines, has 31 of the type on order. Additional parking stands will also be built for both passenger and cargo aircraft.

CAG said airline charges and passenger fees will increase between 2025 and 2030 to fund the upgrades. The increases will also allow the airport to recover "significant investments" in Terminals 2 and 3 made during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to CAG, the increase in passenger fees is estimated to be around 1% or less for an economy class ticket "on most flights departing from or connecting through Singapore." It will now consult with its airline operators over the fee increases and implement a 50% rebate on any rises for a six-month period starting April 1, 2025.

The airport operator added that it is now working with the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore to monitor the airport's performance "to respond nimbly and make further adjustments if needed, to ensure the air hub's competitiveness." (Photo Changi Airport Group)

AviAlliance to acquire AGS Airports

THE OWNER of three UK airports, AGS Airport Holdings is to be sold in a deal worth £1.53bn. Macquarie Asset Management (Macquarie) and Spanish infrastructure firm Ferrovial will sell the company to AviAlliance, which has interests in Athens, Dusseldorf, Hamburg and San Juan airports.

AGS currently owns and runs Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Southampton airports, which handle over 10.8 million passengers each year. The firm was established as a 50:50 venture by Ferrovial and Macquarie in 2014, taking over the running of the airports from Heathrow Airport Holdings.

Since 2014, the company has invested some £250m into the three airports "aimed at delivering a better experience for passengers." This included £20m at Aberdeen to increase its terminal by 50%, a £9m investment at Glasgow to revamp infrastructure to accommodate all widebodied aircraft and improve the terminal facilities, and a £17m runway extension at Southampton, which opened in August 2023.

Andy Cliffe, chief executive officer of AGS Airports, said: "Over the past ten years, Macquarie and Ferrovial have played a central role in unlocking our full potential. Their close partnership with the teams across our three airports ensured we had the support to invest in our passenger offering while improving our operations. We are grateful for their close stewardship and look forward to continuing to develop our services and beneficial impact on passengers and communities across the regions of Aberdeen, Glasgow and Southampton."

AviAlliance is a German-based company owned by Canada's public sector pension investment board (PSP Investments). The firm's managing director, Gerhard Schroeder, said they plan to help the airports "realise their full potential". He added: "We are committed to supporting the airports over the long term to expand their route networks, further improve the passenger experience and implement the airports' sustainability strategy." (Photo AGS Airports)

Welcome to Southampton Airport

Sky View

Insights and opinions on the industry's hottest topics

By Jonathan Hinkles, 30-year UK airline executive

"Things will improve before the end of 2024," one aircraft manufacturer assured me in a meeting last year. "The supply chain issues will be largely resolved and back to normal."

As it turned out, this couldn't be further from the reality. Issues with the supply of key components that – quite literally – keep the engines and wheels turning on aircraft throughout the industry are still very much in evidence. Couple this with industrial disputes at Boeing, strikes affecting new deliveries, issues with the Pratt & Whitney geared turbofan (GTF) engines powering many Airbus A320neo and Embraer E2 family aircraft, landing gear and propeller component shortages for the ATRs that are the mainstay of services to many regional communities – the list goes on.

British Airways has deferred the launch of its new route to Kuala Lumpur, cancelled a long-standing link to Kuwait, and handed off operation of some of its transatlantic services to partner airlines. Similarly, Virgin Atlantic has deferred the launch of a planned route to Accra and the resumption of flights to Tel Aviv. Both companies cited issues with the Rolls-Royce Trent 1000 engines powering their Boeing 787s – BA has had up to five of its 787 fleet grounded at any time this year due to lack of engines. Ryanair has slowed its growth plans as deliveries of new 737 'gamechanger'– the 737 MAX to you and I – have not materialised as expected.

So why, after all this time, are we still seeing this lingering effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the industry, and why does the impact on passenger choice seem to be getting worse rather than better?

Over the last couple of years, airlines have become incredibly adept at dealing with these challenges. One could say that necessity has been the mother of invention in many regards – juggling flying between different types of aircraft in their fleets and delaying retirement of older types are just a couple of the tools that have been used to keep the show on the road. The latest swathe of route suspensions reflect the fact that this flexibility has now been almost completely exhausted. Flying other fleets to compensate for the absence of 787s means that those aircraft are using up their allotted hours between major overhauls more quickly, so they now need significant maintenance downtime themselves. There's also a limit as to how long it is viable and practicable to postpone retirement of older aircraft.

Although all of this is less than ideal, it is to their credit that airlines are recognising these issues far in advance and taking proactive steps to adjust schedules so that on-the-day disruption to passenger journeys is avoided. In one regard, that can be considered progress of a sort, but it's not good for the whole industry when flight disruptions and airport horror stories become front-page news.

It's equally apparent that post-pandemic travel demand is levelling out in certain areas. In the US, Spirit Airlines filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection recently after defying gravity for the last few months. It is planning to shed between 50 and 60 aircraft, which will no doubt quench the capacity thirst of some other airlines and send a few more aircraft to the breaker's yard for spare parts. The proceeds from selling those aircraft will be part of Spirit's refinancing – one of the ironies of the US Chapter 11 process is that the surplus of aircraft which led the airline to bankruptcy in the first place could now be its saviour. In Europe, the bankruptcy of XFly in Estonia will land some ATR 72-600 and Bombardier CRJ-900 aircraft on the market, providing a similar shot in the arm for the regional aircraft market and supply chain.

Yet are the fundamental problems going to get any better? There are certainly clear signals that recruitment and training in the larger aerospace companies is proceeding apace, now that those companies have certainty of future business and income upon which to base hiring decisions. It also looks as though the availability of key components and spare parts may well start to improve during 2025.

One key issue remains: cost. The price of spares and component overhauls has risen dramatically over the last couple of years, with shortages driving costs ever higher. I have a sneaking suspicion that, even when the supply chain reaches a 'new normal', aircraft maintenance costs will have been reset to an entirely new level. Together with the costs of meeting the new sustainable aviation fuel mandate recently signed into UK law, this will continue to reflect in higher airline ticket prices. The UK inflation figures for September already showed a record increase in air fares and I don't think we've seen the last of headlines of that nature. AW

> “It looks as though the availability of key components and spare parts may well start to improve during 2025”

Evolving ETIHAD

Etihad Airways has changed tack more than once during its lifetime, but how is it shaping up to face the future? **Siddharth Ganesh** investigates

ETIHAD
FROM ABU DHABI TO THE WORLD
LZ

Etihad's 21-year journey so far resembles that of a sinusoidal wave, from its lavish launch and global growth rising to a peak followed by downsizing as the COVID-19 pandemic dipped it into a trough. In this one cycle, the Abu Dhabi-based airline's identity swung from luxurious full-service carrier to mid-sized boutique airline. Now in the first phase of its third decade, it is embarking on an ambitious new period under the leadership of CEO Antonoaldo Neves, who is steering the airline in a promising new direction. While the carrier repositions over the next few years, it is intriguing to wonder whether it might yet acquire another new identity.

The airline is on the mission it outlined at the Dubai Airshow in November 2023 – Journey 2030 – to double the fleet size and triple passenger numbers by the end of the decade. In a nutshell, that will involve flying 33 million passengers annually and operating 160 aircraft to more than 125 destinations. A year later, the rate of growth appears to be ahead of schedule as Arik De, chief revenue and commercial officer, noted when speaking to *Skift* in September 2024: "With Journey 2030, we will go from roughly 96 aircraft today to around 170. We're going to end 2024 having carried around 17 million guests. By 2030 this will probably be around 35 million. We currently fly to around 80 destinations, we'll probably end Journey 2030 with between 140 and 150."

BELOW: ***Etihad operates a fleet of 43 Boeing 787 Dreamliners from its home hub in Abu Dhabi, including 787-9, A6-BLZ (c/n 42369) seen here landing at London/Heathrow*** AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ STUART LAWSON

Brand transition

Personalisation is key to the airline. In order to ensure this, the front of house responsibility falls on the cabin crew. As a frequent flyer with the carrier on various aircraft and sector lengths, *Airliner World* has noted the family atmosphere the crew share among each other. Being a 'smaller' large airline with all employees based in Abu Dhabi means the crews know each other beyond the usual confines of work, giving them an edge in teamwork and collaborative spirit, to deliver the best experience to passengers.

In economy class on flights longer than about four hours, tote bags with eyemasks and other basic amenities are provided. For business passengers, a more lavish amenity kit and loungewear, crafted in collaboration with Giorgio Armani and luxury wellness brand ESPA, is supplied. In-flight dining has been subjected to a sustainable twist through a partnership with deSter's reusable tableware, with trays, bowls and lids all made from high-quality recycled materials, completely eliminating single-use plastics. Menus have also changed, taking inspiration from local flavours found at destination points.

Cabin differentiation and maintenance of the unique Etihad image has been another avenue where the airline remains distinctive. Three new Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners featuring an improved cabin, were delivered in February this year, while the remainder of the 787 fleet, along with the carrier's Airbus A350s and A380s retain a high level of commonality and offer a variety of seat features. The narrowbody roster of A320s and A321s include the addition in 2024 of six former Bamboo Airways A321neos with a refreshed cabin. While in-flight entertainment screens are not present on these airframes, passengers can still connect their personal devices to the network stream from the airline's E-BOX system. The narrowbody cabin experience is certainly promising, but for passengers transiting through Abu Dhabi onto a widebody, there is an all-round uplift to be enjoyed on the larger aircraft. Fellow Middle Eastern carriers Emirates and Qatar Airways have »

"The transit experience at Abu Dhabi improved significantly with the opening of what is now known as Terminal A at Zayed International Airport"

ABOVE: *The airline has nine 777-300ERs in the fleet including A6-ETC (c/n 34599), seen here departing Milan/Malpensa in June 2021* AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ CARLO MARCORA

LEFT: *The A380 livery is inspired by traditional Emirati design patterns, the landscapes of the desert and the geometric shapes found in the architecture of Abu Dhabi* AIRBUS/ PHILIPPE MASCLET

BELOW LEFT: *The fleet incorporates five Airbus A350-1000s, including six-year-old A6-XWB, (c/n 290)* AIRBUS/JEAN-VINCENT REYMONDON

very consistent levels of cabin experience on all fleet types.

Instead of a premium economy class, Etihad introduced Economy Space to its widebody fleet, which features a generous 36in pitch and is located in the front of the economy cabin. It is a well-designed product, sitting comfortably between economy and premium economy at a nominal fee. Neves recently announced the airline would spend $7bn over the next six years refurbishing older 777-300ERs that need to be retained for longer than expected due to late deliveries of new 787s.

The transit experience at Abu Dhabi has improved significantly from the somewhat challenging, overcrowded facility, with the opening of Terminal A at what is now known as Zayed International Airport. The new complex provides an unparalleled airport experience, as detailed in the November 2024 issue of *Airliner World.* The new terminal is nominally X-shaped in plan view and designed on a biometric touchpoint-based system. With one of the fastest baggage systems around, it has reduced transit times to as little as 45 minutes, allowing the airline to offer an increased number of connecting flights. The carrier's business and first-class lounges are spread over three floors and offer a direct connection to some gates.

A new network

Prior to the pandemic, Etihad operated a mixed fleet to global destinations. Ultra-long-haul reached as far as Los Angeles, San Francisco and Dallas in the US, plus Sao Paulo in Brazil, using 777-200LRs. It also headed east, operating the A380 to Sydney and Melbourne in Australia, Mumbai in India and Seoul in South Korea. The airline operated A330-200s and -300s to several European and Asian cities and the 777-300ER to major gateways on the east coast of the US.

The current network is quite different and a new hub-and-spoke model is being created with the 787 family forming the backbone, along with the 777-300ER, A350, A380 and A320 Family. In May this year, Neves told *AeroTelegraph*: "Instead of trying to connect ultra-long-haul to ultra-long-haul and competing head-to-head with the other two big Gulf carriers, we could bet on India, the Middle East, Pakistan and Southeast Asia. These regions are going to grow a lot, but catering to them requires a different kind of network. We need to have a dominant presence in those markets and compete with a great product, great quality and frequency." This niche network revolves around a seven-hour radius, with a focus on frequency, created by the deployment of the right aircraft.

Type	Number of aircraft
Airbus A320-200	14
Airbus A321-200	9
Airbus A321neo	6
Airbus A350-1000	5
Airbus A380	7
Boeing 777-300ER	9
Boeing 777F	5
Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner	33
Boeing 787-10 Dreamliner	10
Total aircraft	98

Data correct at the time of publication

> **"London has always been a primary market for Etihad and the demand is served with four flights a day, two of which are on the A380"**

For Mumbai, the airline offers four daily direct flights, usually operated by different aircraft types, ranging from the A320 for point-to-point links to the 787, A350 and A380 for European and American connections. The A380 service to Mumbai is aligned to leave Zayed International with transfer passengers from New York, Boston and Chicago, and returns to Abu Dhabi with passengers bound for Europe and North America as Etihad's most important westbound wave commences at around 0200hrs.

Channelling flights from Southeast Asian countries and aligning them with services to onward destinations seems to be a priority for the carrier, but frequency matters. Westbound flights to Europe and North America are based on a one-and-a-half wave system, but the airline is keen to get double daily rotations to most of its European and US destinations, and offer a two-wave system on long-haul services. London has always been a primary market for Etihad and the demand is served with four flights a day, two of which use the A380. Closer to home, a four-wave system operates for short-haul connections to the Gulf region, Middle East and Asia. »

ABOVE: *The airline has 14 Airbus A320-200s in its fleet, including A6-EIH (c/n 3693) which has operated since November 2008* AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/TT

RIGHT: *A321-231 A6-AED (c/n 6382) taxiing at Zayed International with the iconic air traffic control tower, resembling a traditional dhow, in the background* ETIHAD AIRWAYS

BELOW: *A321neo A6-AEN (c/n 8260) in special colours celebrating 20 years of the airline* ETIHAD AIRWAYS

New destinations galore

In November 2024, the flag carrier announced the launch of ten new destinations which it will begin to serve from Abu Dhabi during 2025. These include Algiers (Algeria), Atlanta (US), Chiang Mai (Thailand), Hanoi (Vietnam), Hong Kong, Krabi (Thailand), Medan (Indonesia), Phnom Penh (Cambodia), Taipei (Taiwan), and Tunis (Tunisia). Atlanta is scheduled to be served by an Airbus A350, while Medan, Phnom Penh, Krabi, Tunis, Chiang Mai, Hanoi and Algiers will be operated using A321LRs. A Boeing 787 will be used for the Taipei and Hong Kong routes.

Fleet focus

The 787-9s and -10s make up 49% of the current fleet and are used across India, Southeast Asia, most destinations in Europe and as far as New York. The five A350s operate a fixed set of routes: from Tokyo in the east to Chicago in the west, Paris and Zurich in Europe, plus a short-haul rotation to Jeddah. The older higher capacity 777-300ERs are also tied to fixed gateways that cover the primary Australian markets of Melbourne and Sydney, though they will be replaced by Dreamliners in due course.

The A320 Family (the A320-200, A321-200 and A321neos) operate around the local Gulf region, Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. With an approximate four-hour radius and high utilisation, the aircraft are the core to the four wave, daily short-haul routes. Next year, the airline will welcome its first A321LRs, which will incorporate a three-class cabin comprising two first-class seats, 14 lie-flat business class seats and 144 economy seats. The aircraft will serve new thinner markets – Dusseldorf and Copenhagen will be the launch routes – and complement other aircraft in the fleet on those double daily routes.

The final horse in the stable, the A380, has been making something of a comeback, with five of the airline's seven aircraft returned to service, with the sixth expected in February and the seventh by June 2025. Currently operating to London, New York, Paris and Mumbai (until the end of 2024), Singapore will join the list of destinations from February. Known for their spacious cabins and luxury amenities, the A380s will reintroduce Etihad's popular First Apartments and The Residence on high-yield routes, enhancing the carrier's offering on long-haul services. The type will strengthen the airline's presence in highly competitive markets such as London and New York, where the A380's capacity and onboard services will cater to both leisure and business travellers.

ABOVE LEFT: *Located across three floors, the lounges at Zayed International offer direct access to some gates* SIDDHARTH GANESH

ABOVE: *The economy cabins on the carrier's Dreamliners are configured in a 3-3-3 layout* SIDDHARTH GANESH

LEFT: *Business class catering* SIDDHARTH GANESH

RIGHT: *Economy class catering* SIDDHARTH GANESH

BELOW LEFT: *A350-1041, A6-XWB (c/n 290), on the gate at Paris/Charles de Gaulle* SIDDHARTH GANESH

BELOW RIGHT: *At its widest point, the central core of Terminal A at Zayed International is 590ft across, yet largely column-free* SIDDHARTH GANESH

The future

For the first half of 2024, Etihad enjoyed healthy numbers, transporting 8.7 million passengers and logging a profit after tax of $232m. Low-cost competition at Zayed International from Wizz Air Abu Dhabi and Air Arabia Abu Dhabi should motivate Etihad to stay competitive. Abu Dhabi has bolstered itself as a destination city and the influx of tourists has been moderate, with 24 million arriving during 2024, including a 54% increase in international visitors. On the other hand, could momentum across the Arabian Sea from Air India and IndiGo affect Etihad's largest market, where it currently operates 176 flights? One way or another, the sinusoidal wave is sure to continue. AW

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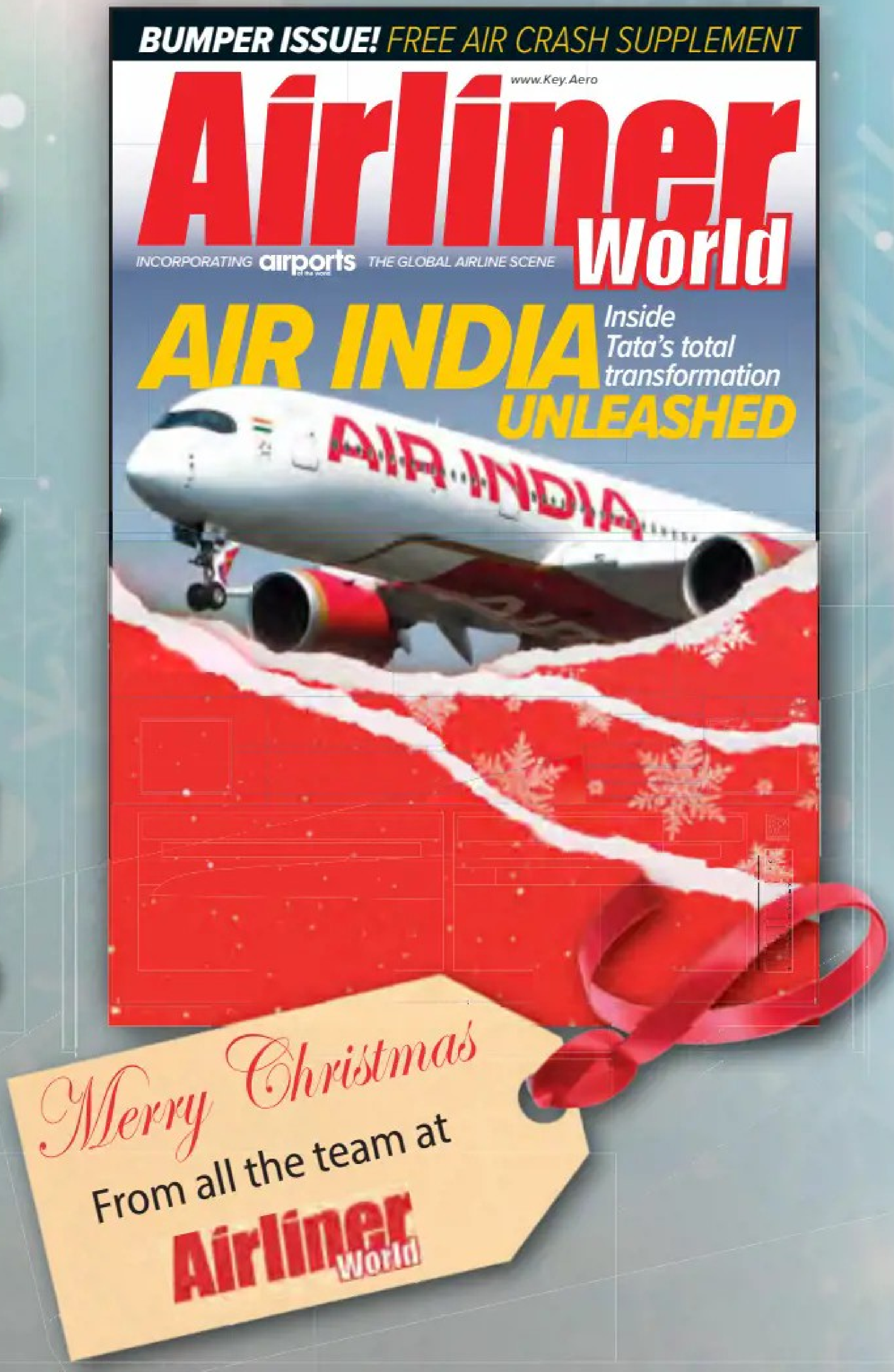
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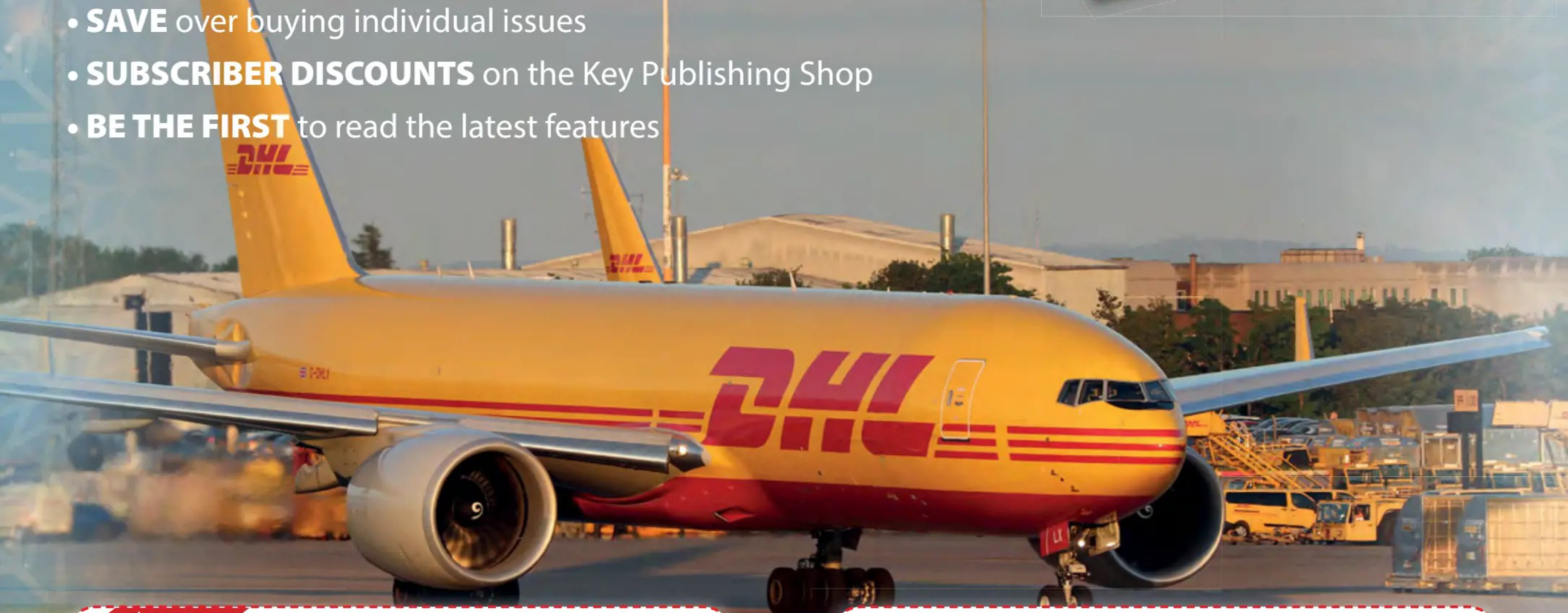

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An elevated experience

The brainchild of Uber co-founder Garrett Camp, Aero is an airline offering scheduled semi-private jet flights to a handful of destinations using Embraer ERJ135s. **Matteo Legnani** travelled to California to try it out and meet CFO and COO **Mikael Pelet**

Unless you're a wealthy resident in the Los Angeles area, you've probably never heard of Aero. The Southern Californian carrier calls itself a "semi-private jet service", meaning that customers fly (almost) as if they're on a private jet, but book seats on its website in the same fashion as any other airline worldwide. However, the luxury air carrier has much more to offer to its privileged passengers, as *Airliner World* found out during a visit to its facilities at Van Nuys Airport for a flight on a beautifully sunny autumn day.

Aero foundations

The carrier – which is in its fifth year of operations – flies scheduled domestic flights in the Western part of the US from Los Angeles to high-end leisure destinations and to Los Cabos in Mexico. However, it wasn't in the US where it originally took shape, but in Europe, when Uber co-founder Garrett Camp envisioned a way to fly elite travellers while providing a better than 'regular' first-class experience and different to what they usually experienced on the private jets they either chartered or owned.

The original route of what later became Aero was operated in the summer of 2019 between the Greek island of Mykonos and the Spanish holiday hotspot of Ibiza. These two destinations were only connected by private jets, as no commercial airline flew from one island to the other. Camp and his team saw the opportunity to 'create a market' and started public charter operations.

"That was when we experimented with several solutions in terms of cabin layouts, boarding procedures, catering and onboard service," said Mikael Pelet, Aero's chief financial officer and chief operations officer, during an interview with *Airliner World* in Los Angeles. Himself a captain for Aero, Pelet added: "The experiment was a success and I can recall that Garrett began asking himself where that business and operational model could be of demand in the US. The obvious answer was Los Angeles, home to a large wealthy community and not far from the high-end destinations where these people spend their holidays and weekends or where they own second houses".

After settling on LA, a decision had to be made about which airport to use. From the outset, Aero's founders did not want to rule out the possibility of connecting destinations outside the US and, in the LA metropolitan area, only two facilities were able to accommodate its international operations: Los Angeles International (LAX) and Van Nuys, home to the third-largest private jet operation in America. "We excluded LAX because it meant flying out of a commercial environment and that did not match with the model we had developed in Europe. So, we went with Van Nuys," explained Pelet. The airport is situated in the San Fernando Valley, some 20 miles to the west of Glendale Burbank Airport, which Pelet explained was "a place that many of our potential customers already knew, because they probably had flown private out of there, and a place 20 to 30 minutes away from their homes in Beverly Hills, Bel Air and other affluent »

BELOW: ***Aero operates a five-strong fleet including four Embraer ERJ135s and one Legacy 600***
AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ ALEX PEAKE

Aero

Aero

Los Angeles suburbs. A place much easier and quicker for them to reach than LAX." After Aero obtained its air operator certificate (AOC) in 2020, it started developing its business and operational model under Federal Aviation Regulation Part 135, which applies to commuter and charter-type air carriers. Unlike the more restrictive Part 121 regulations that govern most scheduled airlines flying aircraft with more than 20 seats, operating under Part 135 means extremely quick boarding procedures at private FBO terminals and complete control over the guest experience, as no TSA security screening is required for passengers, except for those flights departing to international destinations.

Fleet focus

The Aero team established a base in the southeastern corner of Van Nuys Airport and started building the fleet around the Embraer ERJ135, which they identified as the most suitable aircraft for the semi-private air carrier they intended to launch.

"It is a great platform, with excellent range and cabin comfort and a spacious cargo hold in the back, for being a quite small aircraft," the COO said. "And should we decide to grow in size, the ERJ145 is there."

A total of five airframes were sourced: four ERJ135s and one Legacy 600, which is the corporate jet derivative of the commercial ERJ135. "Two of them came from Embraer directly, one was a former American Eagle aircraft and the last two were used as corporate shuttles in the US and in Brazil," he explained.

Normally, the ERJ135s are fitted with 35-37 seats. Aero's can carry a maximum of 16 passengers (while the Legacy, which is in a corporate jet cabin configuration, has 13 seats). The airline's ERJs underwent a total cabin overhaul: "Our team designed a brand new interior, which included a 1-1 layout with 43in of seat pitch, hand-stitched Italian leather seats, dynamic mood lighting, suede walls, a flat floor and no overhead bins. The conversion itself took around nine months, including certification from the Federal Aviation Administration. Everything was chosen by Garrett, from the name and logo, to the total black livery which makes our fleet so eye-catching and easily recognisable." The FAA authorisation came in early 2021, with Aspen, Colorado, chosen as the first destination: "Apart from being the most famous and glamourous ski resort in North America, Aspen is a very challenging place to fly, as its Pitkin County Airport is surrounded by mountains and is subject to changing winds. At an altitude of 7,820ft, visibility can be unpredictable, particularly during the winter season. So before starting operations, our pilots went through dozens of sessions in the simulator, practising with every imaginable condition. Initially, we flew

»

Aero fleet listing

Aircraft type	Registration	C/n	Age	No. seats	Notes
Embraer ERJ135LR	N1023C	145550	22.9	16	Ex-ConocoPhillips (Alaska's largest oil producer) shuttle aircraft
Embraer ERJ135LR	N402AT	145702	21.8	16	Delta Connection 2003-2010
Embraer ERJ135LR	N404AT	145715	21.7	16	Delta Connection 2003-2014
Embraer ERJ135LR	N712AE	145247	24.7	16	Ex-American Eagle 2000-2020
Embraer EMB135BJ Legacy 600	N809TD	14500809	20.5	13	US corporate aircraft

ABOVE: ***An all-black colour scheme makes the airline's fleet stand out***

TOP LEFT: ***The carrier is based at Van Nuys Airport near Los Angeles*** AERO

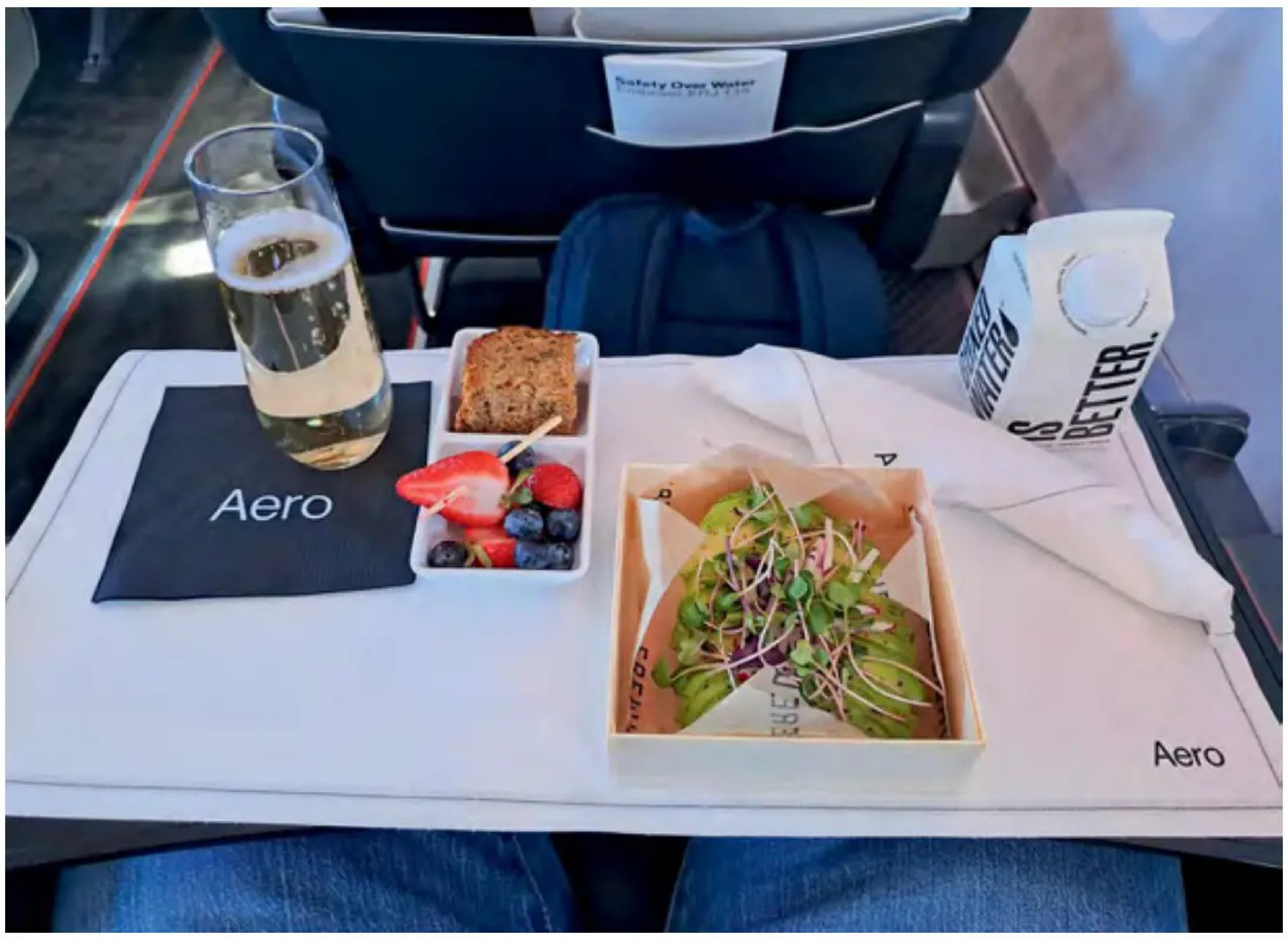
TOP MIDDLE: ***The lounge for customers at Van Nuys is well appointed with comfortable chairs and refreshments***
ALL IMAGES AUTHOR UNLESS STATED

BOTTOM MIDDLE: ***COO and CFO Mikael Pelet also flies as a captain with Aero*** AERO

BOTTOM LEFT: ***ERJ135, N402AT (c/n 145702), was previously operated by Delta Connection between 2003 and 2010, before becoming a corporate air shuttle for Brazilian mining company Vale until 2017. A three-year stint with another Brazilian firm followed before it joined Aero's fleet in 2020***

RIGHT: ***The interiors are not fitted with in-flight entertainment systems, but Starlink-powered Wi-Fi is available to use for free onboard***

FASTEN SEAT BELT WHILE SEATED
USE BOTTOM CUSHION FOR FLOTATION
LIFE VEST UNDER SEAT



ABOVE: ***After landing in Aspen, the flight taxied past the commercial terminal with its complement of United Express Bombardier CRJs***

TOP LEFT: ***The take-off from Van Nuys was dynamic due to the aircraft's light load***

BOTTOM LEFT: ***Airliner** World **enjoyed an avocado tartine in an attractive Erewhon-branded box with a side of berries and a slice of cake, accompanied by a stemless flute of champagne***

RIGHT: ***The lounge for Aero customers at Aspen is a little more basic than the flagship facility at Van Nuys***

there only in fine weather conditions, but today we are one of only two air carriers, along with SkyWest, that land there year-round."

Aspen adventure

Airliner World was lucky enough to join the air carrier on its flagship route on a beautiful, sunny day with excellent visibility. The Aero experience begins well before you reach the private terminal at Van Nuys Airport: "We define ourselves as a 'semi-private' jet service, meaning that we offer a private jet-like experience accompanied by services and amenities not available when you charter a private jet. We have a 24/7 concierge service, free valet parking and a dedicated private lounge at the airport, plus one or two cabin attendants on board each of our flights, taking care of the security and comfort of our guests." In the days preceding our flight, we were contacted via email to provide information about our favourite food and drinks, any allergies and health issues. The concierge service replied within a few minutes even to a last-minute, early morning request regarding the exact location of the carrier's terminal in Van Nuys and where to park the car.

We were told to arrive at the Aero terminal at least 20 minutes before the 0900hrs departure time, but were recommended to get there earlier to enjoy the amenities and comfort of the lounge. Eager not to lose even a bit of the experience, we arrived with time to savour a couple of delicious croissants accompanied by a flute of Veuve Clicquot champagne while sitting on one of the luxurious sofas in the lounge. About 15 minutes prior to departure, a 'ramp agent' wearing a smart black suit announced that the aircraft was ready for its guests. We walked the few yards to the ERJ, where the pilots welcomed us on the tarmac before we stepped on board. The two flight attendants (FAs) taking care of the cabin accompanied us to our seats.

The pre-recorded safety briefing was demonstrated by one of the FAs before we taxied to the north end of runway 16R/34L and, less than ten minutes after the doors had been closed, we were up in the air, banking left towards the Rocky Mountains

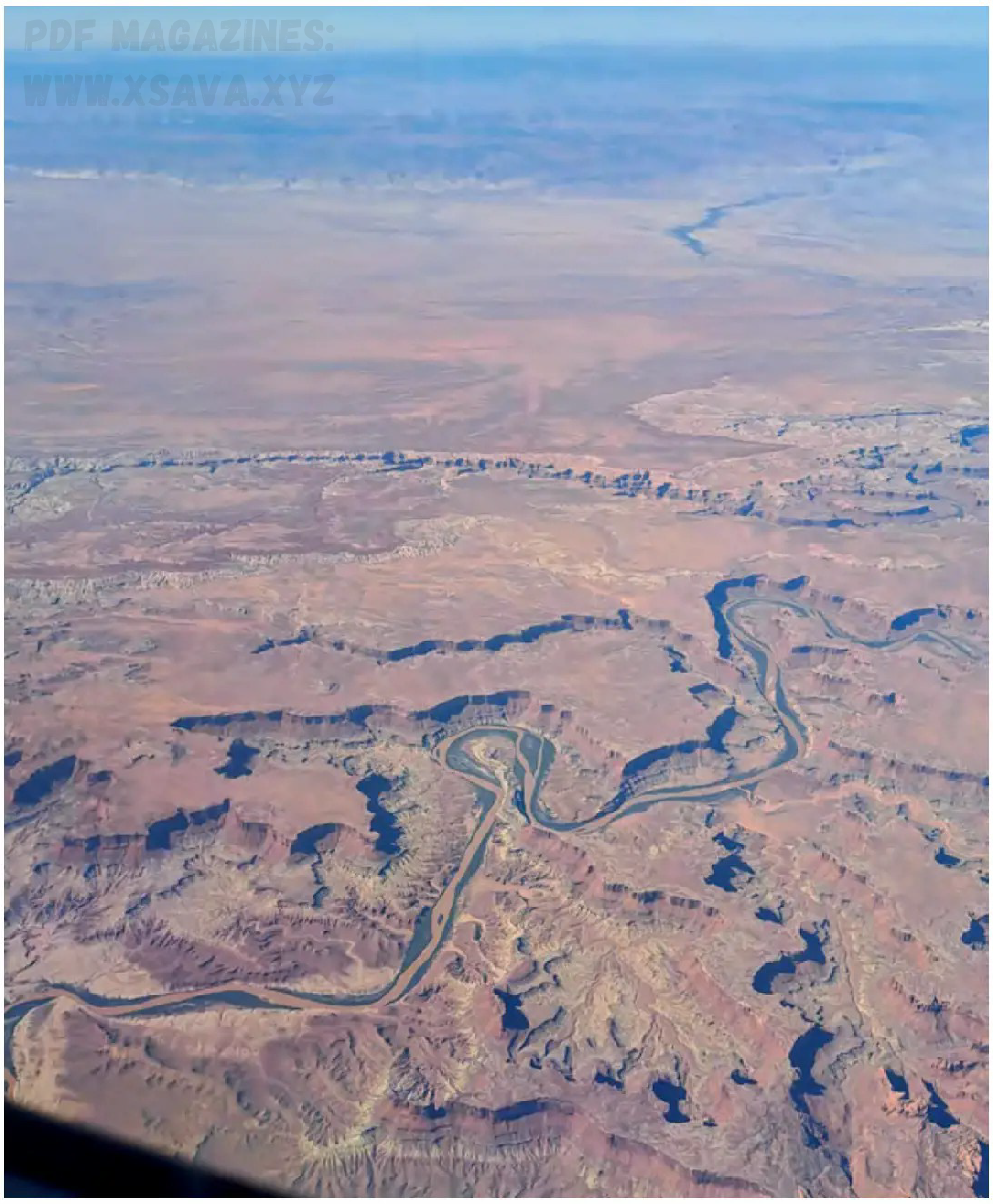
UNITED
Entrance

for a flight expected to be just under the two-hour mark. With such a light load of passengers and practically no luggage, the ERJ performed like a rocket, reaching its cruise altitude of 37,000ft in less than 20 minutes.

While still climbing, we inspected the menu in the seat pocket to find out that Aero arranged its food and beverage service in three categories: 'Daybreak', 'All Day' and 'Afternoon'.

The carrier proudly serves onboard food prepared by upscale LA-based grocer Erewhon Market. From the 'Daybreak' menu, I selected an avocado tartine that was served in an attractive Erewhon-branded box with a side of berries and a slice of cake, accompanied by a stemless flute of champagne. Before the service started, hot towels were distributed. The cabin attendant pulled a dining table from my seat's left armrest and laid a white linen cloth on it. As the food and champagne arrived, I was handed a white linen towel and steel cutlery.

The quality of the food was excellent: fresh and crispy. At the »



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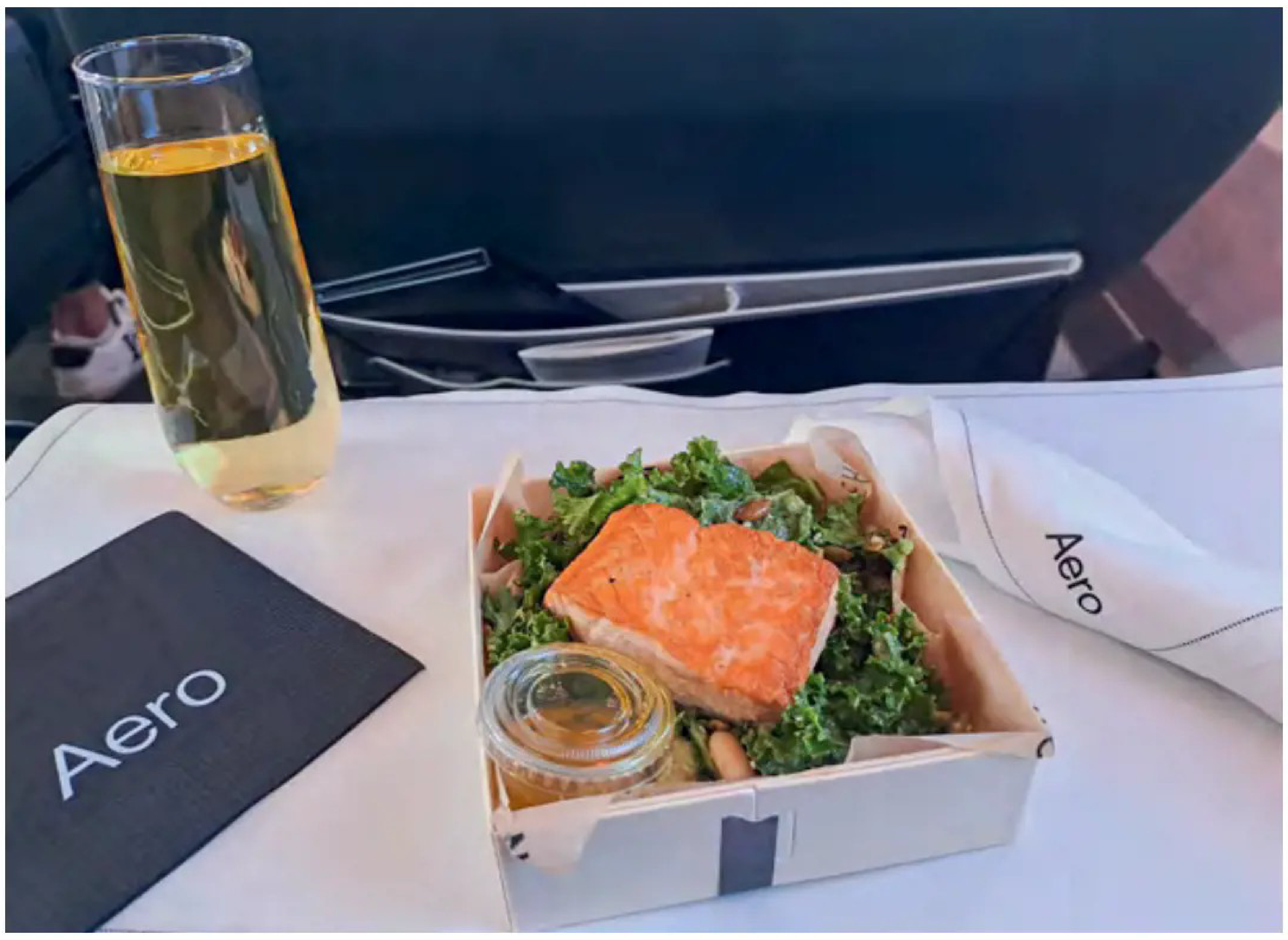
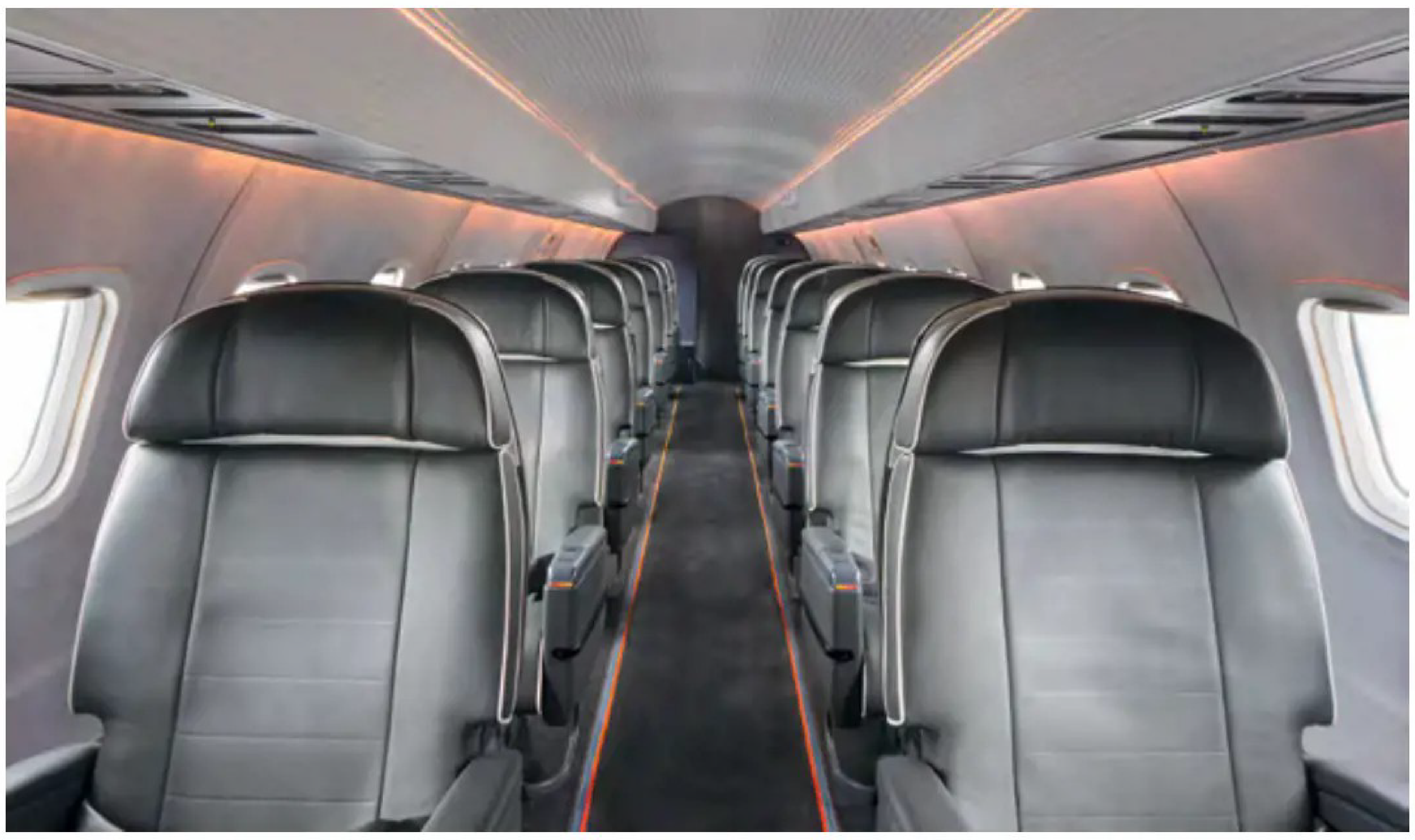
LEFT: ***The views on offer make up for the lack of in-flight entertainment***



LEFT: ***For the return flight,*** Airliner World ***was served roasted salmon with kale, white beans and avocado salad***



LEFT: ***The interior of Aero's fleet are configured to seat 16 passengers, apart from the Legacy 600 which seats 13*** AERO

end of the meal, I was presented with a basket of assorted snacks, ideal for the remaining part of the flight. Aero has no in-flight entertainment, if you exclude the stunning views of Canyonlands National Park along the route. However, the aircraft are equipped with free ultra-fast Wi-Fi powered by Starlink. The connection to the web was so powerful and reliable that I could easily navigate a demanding site such as Flightradar24 and enjoyed a WhatsApp video call with my wife, some 6,000 miles away in Italy!

The descent into Aspen Pitkin County Airport was bumpy but spectacular and filled with amazing views of the surrounding mountains. We made a 270° left turn to align with runway 33 and, a few seconds before touchdown, flew some 500 yards to the south of a hillside. Once on the ground, we taxied past the passenger terminal and stopped near to a group of private jets in the southern part of the airport.

I stepped inside the small lounge dedicated to Aero passengers in Aspen, in preparation for my flight back to Los Angeles. Much smaller and a bit darker, it was a far cry from the beautiful lounge I had enjoyed in Van Nuys. Despite this, it featured comfortable armchairs and a variety of food and beverage options, including more champagne.

Nine travellers were bound back to LA, following a weekend spent in the mountain resort: seven humans and two mid-size dogs. Aero describes itself as a pet friendly air carrier and I had a demonstration of that while boarding the jet in Aspen, when the two dogs stepped on board along with us, easily finding accommodation on the floor of the cabin in the space among the seats. On my way back to California I also noticed that the onboard menu included 'Biscuits and chews' for our canine companions.

For the humans, the 'Afternoon' menu was available with a choice between a mezze platter, carne asada with purple sweet potato and brussels sprout salad, and roasted salmon with kale, white beans and avocado salad. I went with the last of these, which was as beautiful to see as delicious to eat, accompanied by a glass of Napa chardonnay.

I noticed that most of my travel companions (specifically the humans) did not have any food and just ordered something to drink and a snack. That was surprising to me as a 'commercial airlines' passenger, considering the high price ($2,300) of each seat on the flight.

After touching down in Van Nuys, we were met in the lounge by Mikael Pelet who explained the seemingly 'unconventional' behaviour of the passengers: "The majority of our

ABOVE: ***Pets are welcome on board Aero flights*** AERO

customers are people who regularly charter private jets to travel across the country and choose us on the routes we serve because we are an easier alternative to flying private, for example when they have to travel along with their dogs. Or because we offer more services for a cheaper price, such as the concierge, the lounge and the cabin attendants, in comparison with what they get from a traditional private jet operator." Partnerships with several top hotel chains, including the Auberge Resorts Collection, the Waldorf Astoria Los Cabos Pedregal and the Jerome Hotel in Aspen, also give Aero's passengers the possibility of enjoying weekend-long or weekly packages and luxury stays at the air carrier's destinations.

New destinations

Aero's business model is gaining in popularity, evidenced by a wave of four new destinations launched during the second half of 2024. In its first five years, the carrier had a network built around three routes from Van Nuys to Aspen, Sun Valley and Los Cabos in Mexico. In January 2023, it opened a base in Dallas, Texas, where it flew flights to Aspen and Los Cabos. It pulled out of the Lone Star State in March 2024. Seasonal flights to Napa, situated north of San Francisco and where the most popular North American wines are produced, started on September 20 and ran through to December 1 with two weekly rotations on Fridays and Sundays, most suitable for those wishing to spend a weekend of wine tasting and relaxation.

BOTTOM: ***The red to yellow colour gradient of Aero's branding features on the airstair, window blinds and seats*** AERO

Palm Springs came online on November 1, with twice-weekly services on Fridays and Sundays and a schedule currently being sold through to late April 2025. The journey takes less than an hour by air, compared to three to four hours by car along freeways plagued by heavy traffic, particularly on weekends.

The Van Nuys-based airline managed a jet-in (on November 23), jet-out (on November 24) operation during the weekend of the Las Vegas Formula 1 Grand Prix and is set to start scheduled flights from December 27, on a twice-weekly basis (Fridays and Sundays).

Finally, in mid-November, it announced a fourth new destination: Park City, Utah. Flights are set to start in mid-January 2025, in time for the iconic Sundance Film Festival, which is sure to be popular among the Hollywood contingent. "For us, 2024 has been big," Pelet said. "But we have many more routes on the horizon. This is just the beginning. 2025 is going to be a big year for Aero."

From six to success

Founded in 1985, Avtrade has grown over the last four decades into a leading provider of aircraft component support services. ***Airliner World*** sat down with founder **Graeme Brooks** to find out more

ABOVE: *Graeme Brooks, Avtrade founder and CEO at the company's UK headquarters* ALL IMAGES AVTRADE

Airliner World: **Could you tell us how you got into the aviation industry and came to start Avtrade?**

Graeme Brooks: My aviation career began in 1971 when I started working at British Caledonian (BCal) as a buyer of rotable components [parts which are removed and overhauled at specific intervals] for amongst others the Boeing 707, Vickers VC10 and BAC One-Eleven aircraft. I left BCal in 1977 to join a Miami-based aircraft parts dealer as their vice president of sales, where I worked for eight years expanding their sales operation into Europe. In 1985, I started Avtrade hiring two staff in the UK and four in Miami.

ALW: **How has the company developed over the last 40 years?**

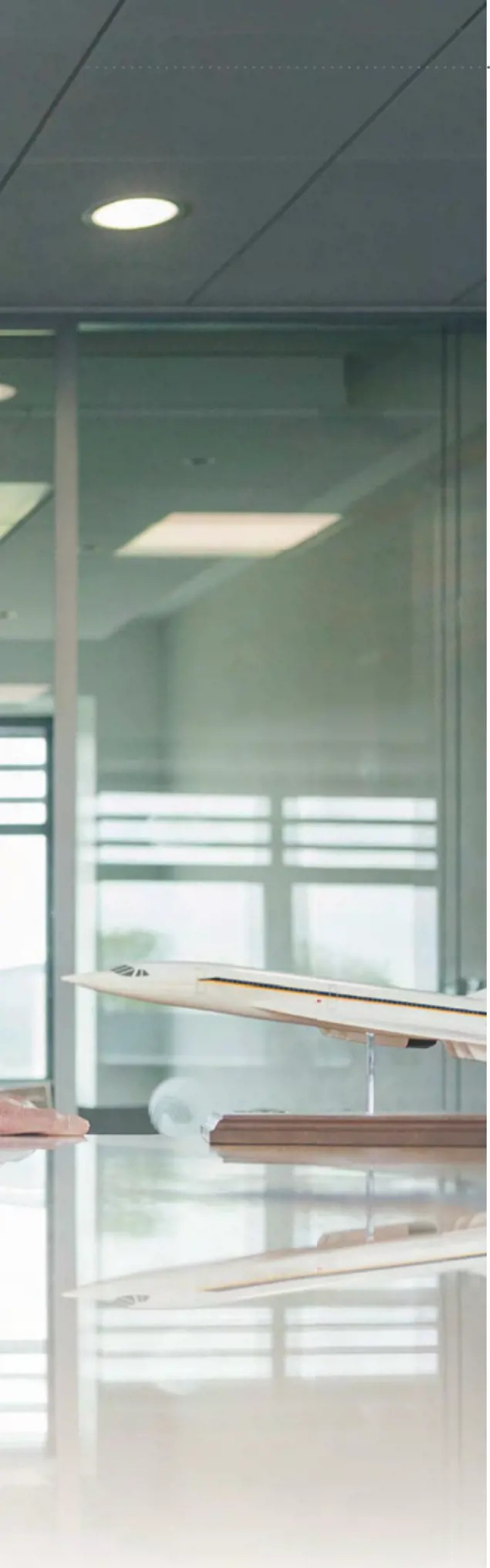
GB: Avtrade has grown from six staff and a home office in Brighton, to our fabulous 250,000sq ft headquarters facility, with offices in Australia, China, Dubai, Ireland, Malaysia, and the US, supported by inventories located in Asia, Europe and the US. We currently utilise the experience and expertise of over 400 individuals to support our worldwide operation. The need to monitor global market trends and potential challenges within our industry is paramount, as is the ability to remain agile in our decision making and how we adapt to the various issues the industry and our business confronts.

ALW: **Currently, what are the main trends within the component services sector and how is Avtrade responding?**

GB: Aviation has always and continues to be an industry of cycles with peaks and downturns that may have far reaching and long lasting effects. The industry is still experiencing some of the effects brought about by the devastation caused by COVID-19, such as supply chain delays, and these are certainly challenging times for our industry. I believe it is imperative for Avtrade to respond to changes with significant continued investment in our workforce, our inventory and our security and quality systems to ensure we are best placed to serve our customers with minimal interruption. Having seen this cyclical nature of aviation through my own 50-year experience, and drawing on my excellent leadership team, we are well placed to anticipate all of the very unexpected challenges.

ALW: **Do you find it a challenge sourcing parts for next-generation aircraft like the Airbus A350 and Boeing 787?**

GB: Continuing high-level investment in quality inventory is my passion, and one which gives Avtrade an advantage over many component providers.



Supply chain shortages resulting from COVID-19 means we must be agile, swift and decisive when looking to purchase components for next-generation platforms.

Knowing what to purchase and when comes with experience and a keen interest in global markets, world events and politics, where changes are known to influence our industry.

***ALW:* What, if any, impact has the well-publicised supply chain problems affecting OEMs had on Avtrade?**

GB: Avtrade has formed excellent relationships with OEMs over many decades and this coupled with my desire to focus on high-level investment allows my procurement teams to purchase quality products as soon as they become available, putting us ahead of many competitors who are not able to act so swiftly.

***ALW:* What is the most common type of spare part you supply?**

GB: Currently the majority of parts we supply our customers are rotable components for newer generation Airbus, Boeing and Embraer platforms.

***ALW:* Can you talk us through an example where Avtrade has saved the day for a customer?**

GB: I have developed Avtrade over four decades to 'save the day' every day for our customers. Operators need to rely on trusted suppliers who can provide them with quality components for their critical and AOG requirements without delay. I won't give details of specific customers or their needs, but thanks to Avtrade having quality inventory on the shelf in any one of our global locations that can ship within minutes, we can guarantee minimum disruption and cost to an operator.

***ALW:* With Avtrade turning 40 this year, what does this anniversary mean to you and the company?**

GB: I am delighted to be celebrating yet another decade of Avtrade's success. Avtrade truly is a global family, and our passionate workforce allows us to maintain our reputation for quality inventory and excellent customer service. I am proud to be at the helm of the world's largest independently owned commercial stockist in our field and I intend to lead Avtrade towards our golden anniversary with the same dedication and commitment.

***ALW:* What is your proudest moment of the last 40 years and why?**

GB: I am immensely proud of what Avtrade has achieved over the last 40 years. Last year was a record year for Avtrade's sales, and the first quarter of this financial year is, for us, the best on record. We look forward to continued growth, maintaining our reputation for the very best customer service and to supporting our airline customers. We are committed to maintaining excellent relationships with major worldwide airlines and to continuing to develop AAF Spares, our joint venture entity with Air France KLM E&M, offering component support to Air France, KLM and its operator customers by way of Pool and Base Kit provision.

***ALW:* Are there any new business areas you're exploring?**

GB: My approach to running Avtrade has always been to remain agile and provide a component service offering aligned with the needs of our customers. Any requests for services outside of our existing scope are given thorough consideration as are new locations for offices or stock positioning. At present our core business function to provide the best quality components and highest levels of customer service remains at the heart of what we do.

***ALW:* Would you like to add anything?**

GB: The Avtrade brand is well-known and highly respected around the globe and the honesty, integrity and unparallelled levels of service we offer 24/7, 365 days helps us provide the best service levels to our customers providing quality parts on time at competitive prices. I am immensely proud of what Avtrade has achieved over the last four decades, and I'm excited to lead it into the future. **AW**

BELOW: *The company has grown into one of the world's leading providers of aircraft component support services*

The unbreak

QANTAS
GO WALLABI
STRONGER AS ONE
Wallabies
QANTAS
Reginald Ansett
4141
43
Virgin

A duopoly has been the status quo in Australian aviation since the 1950s, with occasional bursts of competition
AVIATION IMAGE NETWORK/BAILEY

able duopoly
Down Under

The post-pandemic years have been turbulent for Australia's airline industry. The collapse and rebirth of Virgin Australia, the launch and demise of low-cost carrier Bonza, and the collapse of Rex are but a few of the sensational stories that have hit the industry. **Chris Frame** investigates what's going on

QH
allabies
Virgin
QANTAS
Spirit of Australia
VH-VYF

ANSETT AUSTRALIA
Official Airline of the 2000 Olympic Games
Sydney 2000
VH-HYB

ABOVE: ***Ansett was the official sponsor of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games and spent a small fortune in upgrading its terminal complex at the city's airport***
AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ WORLD AVIATION ARCHIVE

From the 1950s to the 1990s, Australia's commercial aviation industry was legally restricted to two domestic trunk route carriers: privately-owned Ansett Airways and government-owned Trans Australia Airlines (TAA), which later became Australian Airlines.

In 1957, Ansett purchased rival Australian National Airways (ANA). This led to the creation of the Civil Aviation Agreement Act, which blocked additional trunk route competitors and effectively restricted airspace between state capitals to just two incumbents.

The impact of the domestic two-airline policy was dramatic. Speaking to *Airliner World*, Geoffrey Thomas, Australia's leading aviation expert and editor in chief of *Airline Ratings*, explained: "This policy ruled Australian domestic travel for decades and led to both Ansett and TAA running very similar networks and, in most cases, ordering and operating the same aircraft on major routes and at identical times."

Thomas added that manufacturers built and delivered each airline's aircraft virtually simultaneously, a bizarre situation when viewed through today's deregulated lens. Yet, this legislation was considered essential at the time.

After many airline collapses, the government was eager to stabilise the aviation industry and encourage air travel between cities situated hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles apart.

Changing course

The restrictive policy reigned supreme for decades. But from the late 1980s, the Australian government commenced a deregulation spree, selling off national assets, including its stakes in airports and airlines. This ultimately led to the two-airline policy being dropped in 1990.

The country then saw the establishment of its first new domestic trunk route competitor in a generation. Compass Airlines was founded on December 1, 1990, utilising four Airbus A300s and a sole A310. But the fledgling airline struggled to make inroads against the duopoly-dominated market.

"Australian Airlines and Ansett both had a hold of the business travellers, and they had the route network, flight connections and travel agency support, plus a diverse fleet," Thomas noted.

"Compass started flying with huge A300s and had a focus on leisure travellers. They went for fewer flights with the widebodies but had to fill them, which was hard," he explained. "The A300s were available. Compass got a good deal on them. But it was ultimately the wrong plane as they went for volume over frequency. And with this, they were restricted to the busy routes and had to take on the majors' head-on."

Lack of access to domestic terminal space further compounded its woes, and Compass collapsed just one year after its first flight. This coincided with the busy 1991 Christmas period, leaving many people stranded and resulting in intense media scrutiny.

Mergers and flux

The collapse of Compass highlighted an inherent weakness in the newly deregulated industry, leading the Australian government to react. Of their response, Thomas recalled: "The Government said, 'hang on, we are going to fix this', and their solution to this chaos [of Compass collapsing] was to merge the government-owned domestic airline, Australian Airlines, with the government-owned international carrier, Qantas."

In hindsight, one might wonder how this would support a deregulated aviation industry. Thomas highlighted the government's desire to "consolidate the industry and get out

VH-YMA
A300-600R
Compass

BELOW: ***Compass Airlines was the first new domestic trunk route competitor, established following the abolition of the two airline policy in 1990***
AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ THE SAMBA COLLECTION

TOP LEFT: ***Qantas revived the Australian Airlines brand as a full-service carrier in October 2002*** AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ EUROPIX

Virgin
virginblue.com.au
VH-VUJ

TOP RIGHT: ***Virgin Blue was established by Sir Richard Branson in August 2000, further squeezing Ansett's bottom line*** ALL IMAGES AUTHOR UNLESS STATED

of airline ownership”. He continued: “They believed the Australian industry needed major [financially strong] players, and because this was during the era of privatisation, the government also wanted to sell things off.”

Thus, during the 1990s, the Australian aviation industry entered a dramatic period of change. In devising its airline strategy, Thomas said Australia looked to the UK, which had undertaken similar steps. “The government had seen what the British had done with BOAC, merging it with BEA to create British Airways. Given that both domestic carriers, Australian Airlines and the international Qantas, were government-controlled, they decided to do something similar by merging them and then selling off the new, bigger company.”

This shift in priorities saw Australian Airlines absorbed into Qantas in late 1992, with the new juggernaut rebranded as ‘Qantas: The Australian Airline’. However, this decision destabilised the duopoly, as Ansett faced an increased threat, given Qantas’ newfound domestic network was significantly bolstered by its existing international presence.

Considering the challenges faced by Compass, and in an attempt to equalise the playing field against the strength of Qantas, Ansett was granted the right to fly internationally. The large domestic carrier established services to Asia from 1994, utilising leased Boeing 747-300s and -400s.

A major loss

The 1990s were challenging for Ansett as more of the Australian business market shifted to Qantas. Thomas believes the airline’s profits were further eroded by “questionable fleet management during the airline’s TNT/Newscorp ownership” leading to Ansett flying a plethora of aircraft types, adding unnecessary costs to its operation.

“I remember Perth Airport in the 1990s and looking at the Ansett ramp. British Aerospace BAe 146s, Fokker F28s, Boeing 737-300s, Airbus A320s and Boeing 767s, the fleet was absolute chaos,” Thomas recalled, adding that he shared his observations with then-Ansett CEO Rod Eddington.

The fleet issues were exacerbated by Ansett’s higher cost structure than its larger rival. “Its costs were 16 cents per available seat kilometres (ASK), compared with Qantas at 12 cents and Virgin Blue at 8 cents,” noted Thomas. Yet in February 2000, despite its troubles, Air New Zealand acquired complete control of the airline.

That same year, the Australian aviation duopoly was challenged again when Richard Branson launched Virgin Blue. Offering low-cost flights, the airline’s operation started to squeeze Ansett’s bottom line. Branson’s move followed regional carrier Impulse Airlines’ decision to introduce Boeing 717 services on Australia’s east coast in June 2000, meaning multiple carriers were competing for the leisure traveller’s dollar. Ansett now found itself pincered, outpaced by Qantas for business travellers and unable to effectively fend off low-cost competitors with its far higher operating costs.

Despite being the official airline of the 2000 Olympic Games and spending a small fortune on upgrading its sprawling terminal complex in the host city of Sydney, Ansett’s year got worse.

Its flagship Boeing 767 fleet was partially grounded during the busy Christmas period over maintenance issues. This PR disaster was repeated in 2001 when the entire 767 fleet was grounded due to similar concerns.

Ultimately, a loss of public trust, the collapse of its once-lucrative business market, and continual squeezing in the leisure market were too much for Ansett. In September 2001, Air New Zealand controversially cut the Aussie carrier free, placing it into administration.

Consolidate further

Despite an attempt to restart Ansett as a low-frills operator in preparation for sale, the damage to the once-great

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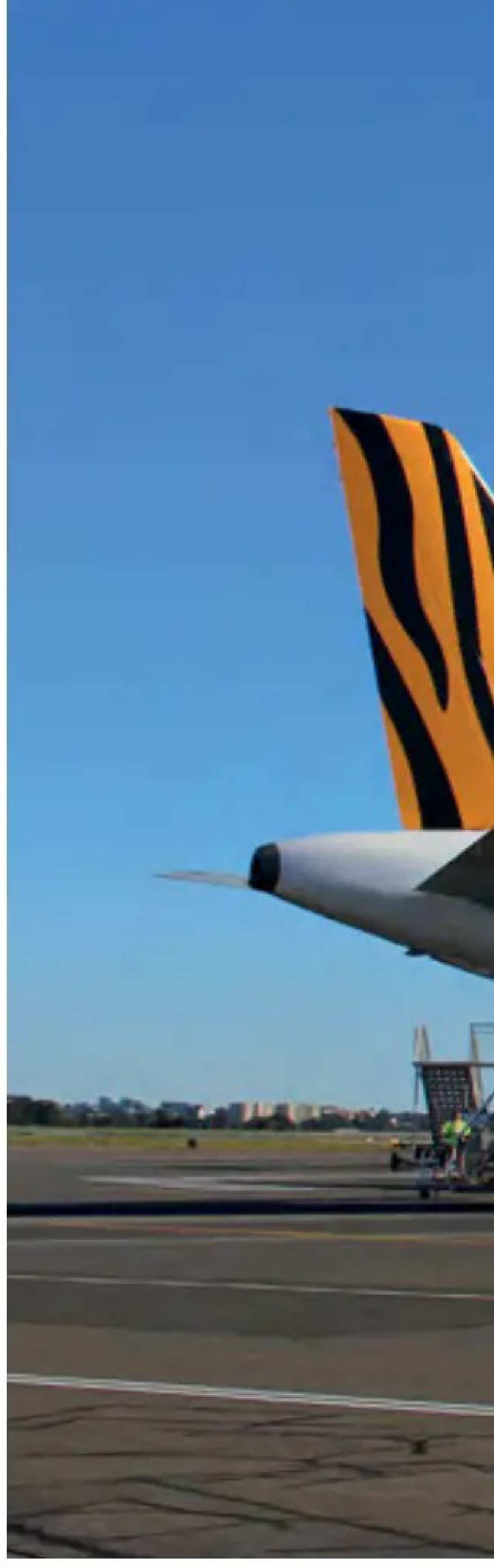
Alliance
VH-FKF
KF

BOTTOM: ***Alliance Airlines was a major operator of the Fokker 100. Established in 2001, the carrier now operates flights on behalf of both Qantas and Virgin Australia***



airline was so large that it flew its final flight on March 5, 2002. However, its collapse gave Virgin Blue space to grow, quickly expanding into all Australian states with a fleet of Boeing 737-700s and -800s, later supplemented with Embraer E190s and E170s.

Underscoring Ansett's high costs, Thomas explained that two years after its collapse, "Virgin Blue employed 3,300 staff against Ansett's 10,000 for domestic trunk routes, and those staff were paid on average, 50% less than Ansett."

Alliance Airlines was established following the 2001 demise of Flight West, a Queensland-based regional carrier affiliated with Ansett. Over the coming decade, Alliance steadily grew into a major operator of the Fokker 100.

Impulse didn't fare as well, being purchased by Qantas in 2001. It was later used as a platform to launch the flag carrier's own low-cost carrier (LCC), Jetstar, in 2004, utilising Boeing 717 aircraft. It has become perhaps the most successful low-cost carrier established by a legacy carrier in history, today operating a fleet of A320 Family aircraft and Boeing 787s.

With a new LCC in the mix, Virgin Blue was now at risk of being pressured at both ends. Yet for the first few years of Jetstar's operation, there appeared to be ample business for all three. As Virgin Blue grew, it launched international services under the V-Australia brand with Boeing 777s and Pacific Island services under the Pacific Blue and Polynesian Blue brands with a fleet of 737s.

In 2007, another challenger entered the market. Melbourne-based Tigerair Australia started life with a fleet of Airbus A320s but failed to enjoy the same good fortune as its rivals. After several safety warnings, it was grounded in 2011.

At this point, Virgin Blue was transforming. Founding CEO Brett Godfrey stepped down in 2010 and was succeeded by former Qantas executive John Borghetti. With a new leadership team, plans were implemented to recreate the airline as a full-service carrier, with Virgin Australia announced as its new name in May 2011.

"Over time, the airline would establish a robust lounge network, introduce business class on domestic flights and absorb the V-Australia, Pacific Blue, and Polynesian Blue fleet into the Virgin Australia brand," Thomas recounted. Further expansion came with the acquisition of Airbus A330s to fly domestic services and ATR 72s to run regional flights.

In 2012, Virgin Australia acquired a 60% holding of the ailing Tigerair, which it later increased to 100%. The latter gave the repositioned Virgin Australia its own low-cost carrier, which it felt would allow it to compete with Jetstar.

A year later, the airline bought regional carrier Skywest, gaining access to regional airports in support of Western Australia's lucrative mining operations. This move established a like-for-like offering with Qantas.

ABOVE: ***Low-cost carrier Jetstar operates a fleet of Airbus A320 Family aircraft and Boeing 787s***

BELOW: ***V-Australia, the long-haul subsidiary of Virgin Blue, launched flights to the US in February 2009*** BOEING

Duopoly restored

After a decade of flux, a duopoly had been restored by the end of 2013. Virgin Australia had succeeded in revolutionising domestic air travel with a high service standard, a spacious and luxurious business class experience, and a vastly improved economy offering. Its shift towards the premium traveller pushed Qantas to respond and thus greatly improved flying across the country. But the problem, according to Thomas, was that this "massive makeover" was completed "probably three times faster than it should have been".

He continued: "Virgin's growth was so much, so quickly. Get a regional airline, Skywest. Get a low-cost airline for the rest of Australia, Tigerair. Get

ABOVE: *Tigerair Australia was another low-cost competitor which commenced operations in 2007 before being purchased by Virgin Australia in 2014*

lounges. Get business class. Get widebodies. Rebrand internationally. It was a huge and quick swing away from the original Virgin Blue model, and thus, the costs were too high.

"By 2019, Virgin Australia was skating on thin ice, and this was in the good times. Going into 2020, the ice was getting thinner and thinner," Thomas added. And as we know now, the last thing an airline wanted in 2020 was to be skating on thin ice.

Challenge and opportunity

The pandemic wasn't kind to Australian airlines. During 2020 and into 2021, the nation's borders were completely closed to foreign travel, and state borders were also closed, meaning domestic travel was effectively shut down.

This left Virgin Australia in a precarious position. Despite several government charters to repatriate Australians, the carrier was forced to shutter services from March, leaving it with a mere six flights per week by early April. At this point, the ice became too thin.

"It was a great product with great service, but it was in trouble, and when COVID-19 hit, that was that," explained Thomas about the situation at Virgin in April 2020. The airline entered voluntary administration on April 21.

Out of the ashes came a saviour, Bain Capital, which announced it would acquire Virgin Australia that same year. Later that year, former Qantas executive Jayne Hrdlicka was appointed new CEO, and the carrier relaunched as a 737-only domestic airline. Importantly, the Tigerair brand was shuttered for good.

This opened a door for regional carrier Rex, which pounced at the opportunity to expand. Thomas explained: "Regional Express [Rex] was created from two Ansett subsidiaries, Kendall and Hazelton, two decades earlier, coming together to form a new regional carrier primarily on Australia's east coast."

In the years following the Ansett collapse, Rex had focused on operating Saab 340 regional flights, expanding into Queensland and later Western Australia to connect regional and remote communities.

"Rex had broader plans. It was regularly going up against the majors when their regional flights overlapped with Rex's network, and the airline aspired to step into domestic trunk services," Thomas noted.

Virgin's collapse allowed Rex to acquire several of the former's 737s to start its own domestic jet services in March 2021. Bizarrely, Rex's aircraft featured an unaltered Virgin Australia-themed cabin coupled with its own casual, country-style service. Its network grew over the coming years, and by May 2024, it was running jets as far west as Perth, north to Cairns, and south to Hobart.

The post-pandemic era also saw the introduction of a new low-cost carrier, Bonza. The brainchild of aviation executive Tim Jordan, the »

RIGHT: *Virgin's various brands were absorbed into the new Virgin Australia, launched in May 2011*

LEFT: ***Following the collapse of Virgin Australia, Rex attempted to expand its operations, launching domestic jet services in March 2021*** REX AIRLINES

carrier was backed by 777 Partners and aimed to bypass city hubs and connect large regional centres with a leased fleet of Boeing 737 MAX 8s provided by its owner.

"Bonza was met with some scepticism from the industry, particularly given it was utilising 737s on routes that skipped major cities," said Thomas. "But the business model was working. What was not working, and nobody understood this, including myself at the time, was the financing was questionable."

At its peak, Bonza operated from three bases: Sunshine Coast, Melbourne, and Gold Coast, and flew to numerous East Coast destinations. But despite a deluge of positive news stories pumped out by the PR teams, all was not well.

Collapse and reset

The year 2023 presented further challenges to the Australian aviation industry. Qantas, the nation's largest airline, was embroiled in a public relations scandal centred on the airline's handling of bookings, refunds, and customer service during the post-pandemic ramp-up. Core to this issue were allegations that the airline had sold tickets for flights that were already cancelled and a significant drop in customer service that led to unprecedented customer complaints.

As the airline's CEO for 15 years, Alan Joyce shouldered the brunt of the blame. He retired early in September 2023 and was replaced by Vanessa Hudson, the carrier's first female CEO.

But Thomas said that the former CEO's downfall was not as cut and dry as it might appear: "We witnessed the lynching of Alan Joyce. The issues that Qantas was criticised for were global. The myriad of problems that Qantas had, every major airline in the world had. But the media decided it was Joyce's fault and decided to go for the man."

Thomas added that Qantas' deep-seated connection to the Australian public makes it a far bigger target. "Qantas is such a revered brand in Australia. Everybody has a view on Qantas," he explained. "A story on Qantas will get ten times the online web traffic that a story on Virgin gets. So, if you're a journalist with a 'Virgin lost my baggage' story, that's not interesting. But if you've got a 'Qantas lost my baggage' story, or a 'Qantas upset my mother' story, that will go bananas."

While the flag carrier faced reputational challenges, Bonza faced existential ones. Numerous cancellation and reliability issues in 2023 led it to scrap five newly launched services. Yet its expansion plans continued, conscripting more 737s from its 777 Partners' sister-brand Flair. However, these plans did not go smoothly, with the airline cancelling numerous flights at short notice, citing issues with regulatory approvals.

The cancelled flights were just the tip of the iceberg, with Bonza dramatically collapsing into administration on April 30, 2024. Flights were grounded immediately, and some travellers arrived at the airport to find the airline no longer flying. Its aircraft were withdrawn from Australia, and with no buyer found, the company folded in July 2024.

Bonza's demise sent shockwaves through regional communities that had backed the hub-busting model. "Their collapse was a blow to regional Australia as it was connecting, with nonstops, many centres that previously required two flights," Thomas said.

That same month, the Australian airline industry was rocked again when Rex fell into voluntary administration, ceasing all jet services, though it did retain its regional flights. Thomas said the collapse of Rex was primarily related to the customers its 737 flights were attracting: "The underlying issue is that the airline had virtually no business class traffic and very little corporate traffic because of Qantas' and Virgin's powerful frequent flyer programmes."

Rex attempted to overcome this issue by launching its own loyalty scheme. However, with 16 million Qantas Frequent Flyer members and 12 million Virgin Australia Velocity members, a good portion of the 27.1 million Australians were already invested in accruing points and status credits with the two largest airlines.

BELOW: ***Virgin Australia has now stabilised its operation under new owners Bain Capital. It has also started to grow with new international services and an order for several Boeing 737 MAX 8 and MAX 10s***

virgin australia
Virgin
VH-VOM

Virgin
bonza
bonza

ABOVE: ***Bonza collapsed into administration on April 30, 2024, and with no buyer found, its fleet of Boeing 737 MAX 8s were returned to their lessors*** BONZA

While Rex remains in the air, its ageing Saab fleet is becoming increasingly challenging and expensive to maintain.

The duopoly remains

As we head into 2025, Australian aviation has reverted to a familiar situation: a trunk route duopoly. Qantas seems to have weathered the storm, reporting stable demand and an expected capacity increase of 10% across the group's airlines for the 2025 financial year. It has also embarked on a fleet renewal programme, replacing its QantasLink-branded 717 fleet with Airbus A220s, operated by National Jet on the major's behalf.

Similarly, QantasLink branding can be found on Embraer E190s flown by Alliance Airlines, which has carved out a unique position, running flights on behalf of both Qantas and Virgin Australia. In addition, Fokker 100 operator Network Aviation was acquired by Qantas in 2011 and is now being used to grow regional services, with Airbus A320s and A319s joining the fold.

For its part, Virgin Australia has not only stabilised in its new configuration, but has started to grow, with the carrier once again commencing international services to destinations such as Bali, Fiji and New Zealand.

The airline also announced a memorandum of understanding to work closely with Qatar Airways following an October 2024 announcement that Qatar intends to acquire a 25% stake in Virgin Australia. Such a move may allow it to recommence long-haul international services utilising wet-leased aircraft.

Thomas sees a silver lining: "Australia has returned to a duopoly, but that is not a bad thing. Virgin, with Qatar now a major partner, will provide greater competition. Qantas has a new customer-focused management, and the flight path for passengers should be smoother and cheaper."

While a duopoly has been the norm in Australian aviation since the 1950s, with bursts of competition seemingly being outliers, there are always those who will attempt to disrupt the status quo. The latest is Melbourne-based Koala Airlines, which, according to its website, is currently finalising negotiations to acquire its 737 MAX 8 fleet and obtain an upgraded AOC. The airline has said that it will "fundamentally differ from previous entrants." Quite how it plans to do this and if it can succeed remains to be seen. **AW**

QANTASLINK

RIGHT: ***Flag carrier Qantas has embarked on a fleet renewal, including retiring its Boeing 717s to be replaced by Airbus A220s, operated under its QantasLink brand*** QANTAS

KOALA
AIRLINES
737-8

BELOW: ***Koala is the latest airline start-up in Australia and plans to "redefine air travel". It is currently looking to source a fleet of 737 MAX 8 aircraft to launch flight operations*** KOALA AIRLINES

Slot secrets

It's one thing to look up at the departures board in a terminal to see the listings of times, airlines and destinations, it's quite another to learn what goes on behind the screens, as **Robert Veitch** discovers

ABOVE: ***KLM Boeing 747-406, PH-BFA (c/n 23999), touching down at Amsterdam/ Schiphol after a slot co-ordinated flight in July 2012*** AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ NUSTYR

Slot co-ordination is something most passengers won't be aware of. It just ticks over in the background, particularly at constrained airports, but it's crucial as Neil Garwood, CEO of Airport Coordination Limited (ACL), explained: "The concept of slots emerged because airport capacity is scarce. If you can build enough airport infrastructure, theoretically you can do without slot co-ordination. But it's not practical, so co-ordination [gets] the best use of scarce capacity. And as time goes on, constraints re-emerge, some in real terms, some on paper [and] these emphasise the requirement for proper slot co-ordination, not by an airport, airline, or regulatory body, but by an independent company. That's what we do. We optimise capacity to make the best use of it."

ACL is one of the world's leading independent slot co-ordinators, operating at 75 airports in 11 countries, overseeing five million aircraft movements, carrying around 700 million passengers each year – all of which is directed by a team of just 45 people.

The principles of slot co-ordination are based on 'historic grandfather' rights that evolved over time into a system. A slot is merely a permission to operate on a certain day at a particular time, offering access to the airport, as Garwood noted: "If you use that slot enough, you'll keep it forever and, in some airports, that means airlines are embedded – their slot portfolio becomes part of the system operation. Other airports are more fluid with more turnover of slots. Why it differs is about the demand profile. As airports have become more constrained, the need for slot co-ordination has become greater, but the principle of historic rights is the essence of slot co-ordination."

Play the game

Global slot co-ordination is mostly universally accepted, although variations exist, as Garwood explained: "You have regulated environments, like the UK and Europe, where there's legislation [that] says how you do this. In other areas, there's guidance – best practice on how you should do it. There is a third area where you don't have a regulation, and you make up your own guidance. Broadly speaking, there's a global framework, on the principles of historic rights, those are pretty well embedded. The concept of a level three airport [a facility where demand significantly exceeds airport capability] being a mandatory slot constrained environment – those principles are pretty clear, anywhere you operate."

Independence is core to the slot co-ordinator role, producing outcomes that don't fear or favour any particular part of the equation. Garwood said co-ordinators try "to get best use of scarce capacity, and do that best when the organisation doesn't have a vested interest in who benefits. Every slot is equal and every airline has an equivalent ability to benefit from the allocation of airport capacity. That's why independence is a core concept of the global regime of slot guidelines and slot rules."

Aviation is based on the winter and summer season and the co-ordinator's role is to ensure airport capacity is best utilised. Slots are allocated for the season ahead of the current season. The 80/20 rule says if slots are used 80% of the time, airlines keep them for the following equivalent season and, if not, they're lost and go back in the slot pool: "At the super-constrained airports, no airline would consider losing its slot, it just wouldn't. They're worth millions, so they find a way to use them or babysit them with another airline – or ultimately sell them and make money from them, rather than just see them go back in the pool for nothing."

One vision

While grandfather rights exist for as long as the airlines maintain the 80/20 regulation, there is capacity within the system to shuffle the pack, as Garwood explained: "The principles do permit mobility. So if you are an airline and you've got a slot at an airport, you can do something with it. You can fly a different route, put a different aircraft on it, you can move it to another airline within your group. Or you can exchange it with another airline [that has] a slot at a different time and you want theirs. The role of the co-ordinator is solely to facilitate that process. The UK distinction is that slots can be bought and sold – it's not essentially provided for in the regulation, but it's not not provided for. Airlines have the ability to financially compensate each other for the exchange of slots between themselves – that's a private transaction. What we do is we say 'Will Airline B be able to take the slot from Airline A and still operate in the constraint parameters?' If the answer is yes, we approve it."

LEFT: ***Neil Garwood, CEO of Airport Coordination Limited*** ACL

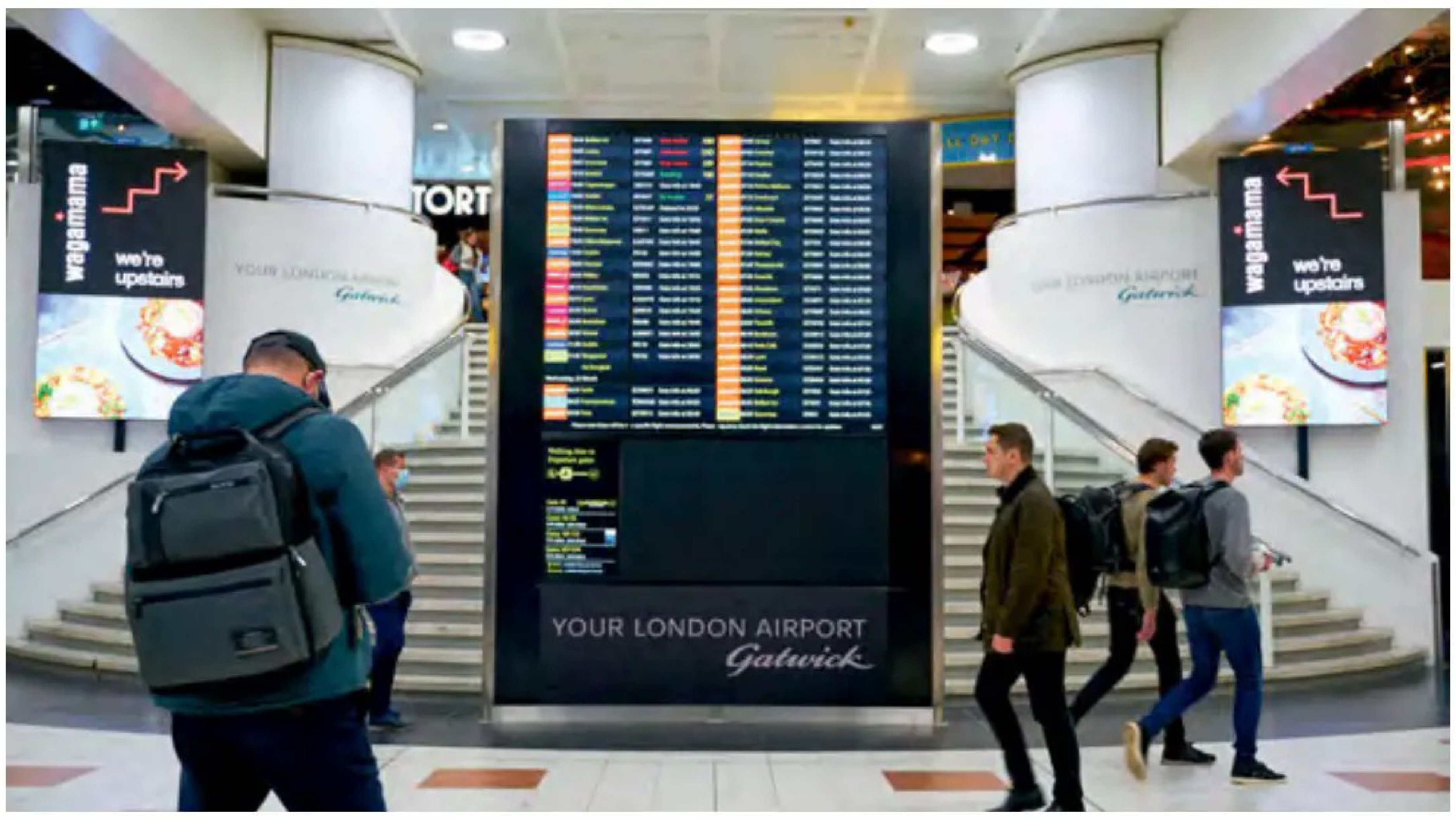
At slot constrained airports, airlines may not have a physical presence, but can retain an ability to return if they lease their slots to other carriers, it being "an opportunity to find other uses for those slots. Because the rules will return them to the slot pool if they're not used. That's ultimately the principle that drives through all of it, and that's consistent across the world. If you don't find an alternative, they will be lost."

Even after an airline enters administration, it retains its slots as long as it has an operating license, as Garwood explained: "You can have a scenario where an airline has no aircraft, no staff, no engineering facilities, but they've still got their slots if they've managed to retain their license. That's what we learned from the Monarch case, and that allows some period of time – not forever, because the license will be removed eventually by the regulator or they will fail the usage requirements.

»

Aircraft queueing to depart from runway 09R at London/Heathrow
BRITISH AIRWAYS

Terminal 3 at Dubai International Airport
DUBAI AIRPORTS



LEFT: *Every departure board hides a trail of correspondence of which passengers will never be aware* GATWICK AIRPORT

There is a period where [a] plan for recovery of the airline can be put into place. Beyond that, the slots will eventually either be dealt with by the administrator, sold or they will return to the pool. But an airline that isn't really an airline any longer can retain a slot portfolio."

How carriers use the slot is up to them. Once it has endured any restrictions on newly allocated slots, then mobility comes into play and, if the slot is used, it goes towards the 80/20 calculation. Garwood noted: "Airlines can be very creative in how they use their slot portfolio. On new routes [where] you don't know if it's going to pay off, you manipulate the slot portfolio accordingly to try and find value and benefit in a route that's not being served. Because if you fossilise this process and require airlines to continue to fly a route that's been allocated forever, you're working against the market. Airlines have to be given the opportunity to have flexibility for market conditions and other things that mean the way the slot was allocated originally may differ over time – that's reasonable within the regime and allows best use of capacity over the long term."

Airlines change things constantly and, at a slot constrained airport, the co-ordinators verify and validate the feasibility. Most passengers have no idea about this until receiving an email from the airline, advising the departure time has moved by a few minutes.

Slot co-ordinators are paid by the airport, who may or may not pass some or all of the charge to the airlines. Slots allocated from the pool have no cost, but at an airport like Heathrow, they are highly valuable, as Garwood pointed out: "The way in is to wait for capacity to be made available. You could be waiting a long time, but as a new entrant you would be prioritised. Or else you could buy your way in or bide your time at another London airport and wait for one of those two things to happen. There isn't capacity available to just turn up and say 'I want to fly next season'. For those reasons, the value of the slots are as they are because you've got a scarce resource that's in demand, so the value is high, and that just reinforces the fact that these slots have a significant level of value to the airlines that own them."

Tailored scenarios

Special events are another area where slot co-ordination is paramount. Garwood highlighted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa on October 21-26, 2024, as an example: "Two things are important when it comes to special events: what is it and where is it? For an event like CHOGM in a place like Samoa, where there isn't the infrastructure on the ground or in the management of capacity, they [will ask us] to co-ordinate the arrival of the heads of state, the management of the aircraft on the ground, their departures and the day-to-day management of the scheduled traffic. If it's an airport that has no need for it normally, then we come along and put that regime in place for a period of time."

Preparations for CHOGM took three to four months and involved hundreds of extra flights, all using a single runway and half a dozen stands. "It's a massive operation for a small nation to consider," Garwood said.

Slot swaps forms use terms such as sale, permanent, transfer, exchange, lease, babysit and seat capacity, but fundamentally they're simple documents: "Can what's being proposed still fit within the capacity constraint? If the answer is yes, we sign it off. What the airlines are doing to arrive at this outcome is not something we see at all. If it fits and this exchange can be feasible, then we have no reason or ability to decline it."

Accrued flight co-ordination data is useful as Garwood highlighted: "We open airports' eyes to what's going on with their schedules and their capacity. We allow them to delay infrastructure investment or make infrastructure investment in the right places. Ultimately, you get an outcome where you've got the airport operating at the highest possible degree of its capacity. You don't create new capacity doing this, but you're making best use of what's there. That's the point: maximum utilisation." AW

BELOW: *Slot co-ordination principles are based on so-called 'historic grandfather' rights* TORONTO PEARSON AIRPORT

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JANUARY 2025

Winter in the northern hemisphere, personified by Air Canada Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, C-FVLQ (c/n 38357), emerging from the de-icing equipment at Toronto in 2020. It has been with the airline since it left Boeing in January 2018 and operates with a three-class layout, offering 30 business, 21 premium economy and 247 economy seats. It is one of 31 examples in the fleet
AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/DEREK MACPHERSON

AIR CANADA
853

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The December 2024 issue of *Pilot* magazine features a newly restored Mk IX Spitfire as its cover star. Stefan Löfgren took to Norwegian skies with former SAS colleague and one of Europe's most experienced warbird pilots, Rolf Meum, to fly the impressive two-seater aircraft.

It's back to the future for a full flight test of the weird and wonderful VariEze. The quirky but high-performing and efficient design that brought composite structures to homebuilt aircraft still looks sensational today, almost half a century after it first appeared. Plus, *Pilot's* tips and strategies for dealing with engine failure after takeoff (EFATO).

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Photo Credit: Keith Wilson

WHAT TO WATCH IN 2025

The aviation industry is as dynamic as it's ever been, making it sometimes hard to pinpoint the most important developments. To help, the *Airliner World* team highlight key areas across airlines, airports and aircraft manufacturers that we'll be keeping a close eye on in 2025

A new game to PLAY

In October 2024, Icelandic low-cost carrier PLAY announced it would make "fundamental changes" to its business model. This included "significantly" reducing its connecting flights between Europe and North America to focus on more leisure-orientated point-to-point services between Iceland and southern Europe.

As part of the move, PLAY has applied for a new Maltese air operators certificate (AOC), which it hopes to complete by spring 2025. This will allow it to base aircraft in Tenerife and operate flights to Keflavík and Akureyri in Iceland and other destinations yet to be announced. In the long term, it expects six or seven aircraft operating under its Icelandic AOC and three or four on the Maltese register.

The changes were announced after the airline revealed that it expects its full-year earnings to fall below last year's numbers.

PLAY has been impacted by an increase in capacity across the Atlantic, which has affected its via-Iceland route network. However, with the capacity already high for European leisure routes and stiff competition from the nation's flag carrier, Icelandair, it will be interesting to see if the airline's new game is worth playing.

»

PLAY
AIRBUS A320neo
flyPLAY.com

BELOW: *Icelandic low-cost airline PLAY began operations on June 24, 2021* PLAY

Manchester's masterplan

For the third year running, Manchester Airport was voted the worst in the UK by *Which?*. The consumer magazine received nearly 7,000 responses to its survey, with passengers stating that the airport had "grim security queues, inadequate seating, 'surly' staff and overpriced shops and restaurants". Terminal 1 and 3 ranked bottom of the table, while the recently refurbished Terminal 2 didn't fare much better, being "poorly rated for seating availability – and the prices in its shops and food outlets".

However, the airport hit back at the report, stating that the survey contained "oversimplified judgements based on the outdated and unrepresentative testimony of a narrow group of travellers".

Can the airport turn things around? Well, its £1.3bn transformation programme is set to be completed in 2025. Terminal 1 is scheduled to close soon, with 29 airlines moving to the expanded Terminal 2, which will eventually serve around 80% of the airport's passengers. Improvement works are also set to start on Terminal 3. Meanwhile, new security scanners are being installed, which should make the process easier for passengers.

A
DEPARTURES
Oversize baggage
B

ABOVE: ***The £1.3bn transformation programme at Manchester is set to be finiahed in 2025***
MANCHESTER AIRPORT

Blue skies for Boeing?

Boeing has had a tough few years. However, with a new CEO, Kelly Ortberg, at the helm, it is hoped that 2025 will be a more positive year for the manufacturer.

Strike action, which had been ongoing since September, finally ended in November when some 33,000 workers returned to the Boeing production line. However, the strike caused further delays to the order backlog of more than 6,000 aircraft.

Then, there are certification issues and delivery delays for some of its newest jets. In July 2024, former CEO David Calhoun said he expected to have the 737 MAX 7 and MAX 10 certified by the FAA in the first half of 2025. Whether Ortberg shares the same timeline as his predecessor remains to be seen.

The 777X, meanwhile, was due to enter service in 2025. This has been pushed back until 2026, which Ortberg said was due to "challenges" in development, the pause in flight testing and ongoing work stoppage.

Another issue the manufacturer faces is Donald Trump's re-election as US president. With Trump threatening to impose hefty tariffs on imports from China, any trade wars between the two nations could seriously affect Boeing. Indeed, China is the largest global market for new aircraft, and Boeing hopes to win some of these new orders.

Ortberg also faces challenges implementing a sea of changes including massive job cuts, changes to aircraft programmes and cultural changes within the company. The new CEO hopes that this will rebuild trust and "restore" the aerospace giant to its former legacy. Will 2025 be the year he manages to make Boeing

BELOW: ***The Boeing 737 MAX 7 (pictured) and MAX 10 are still awaiting certification***
BOEING

737
BOEING
737 MAX
39596

"an iconic company and aerospace leader" again?

Low-cost conundrum

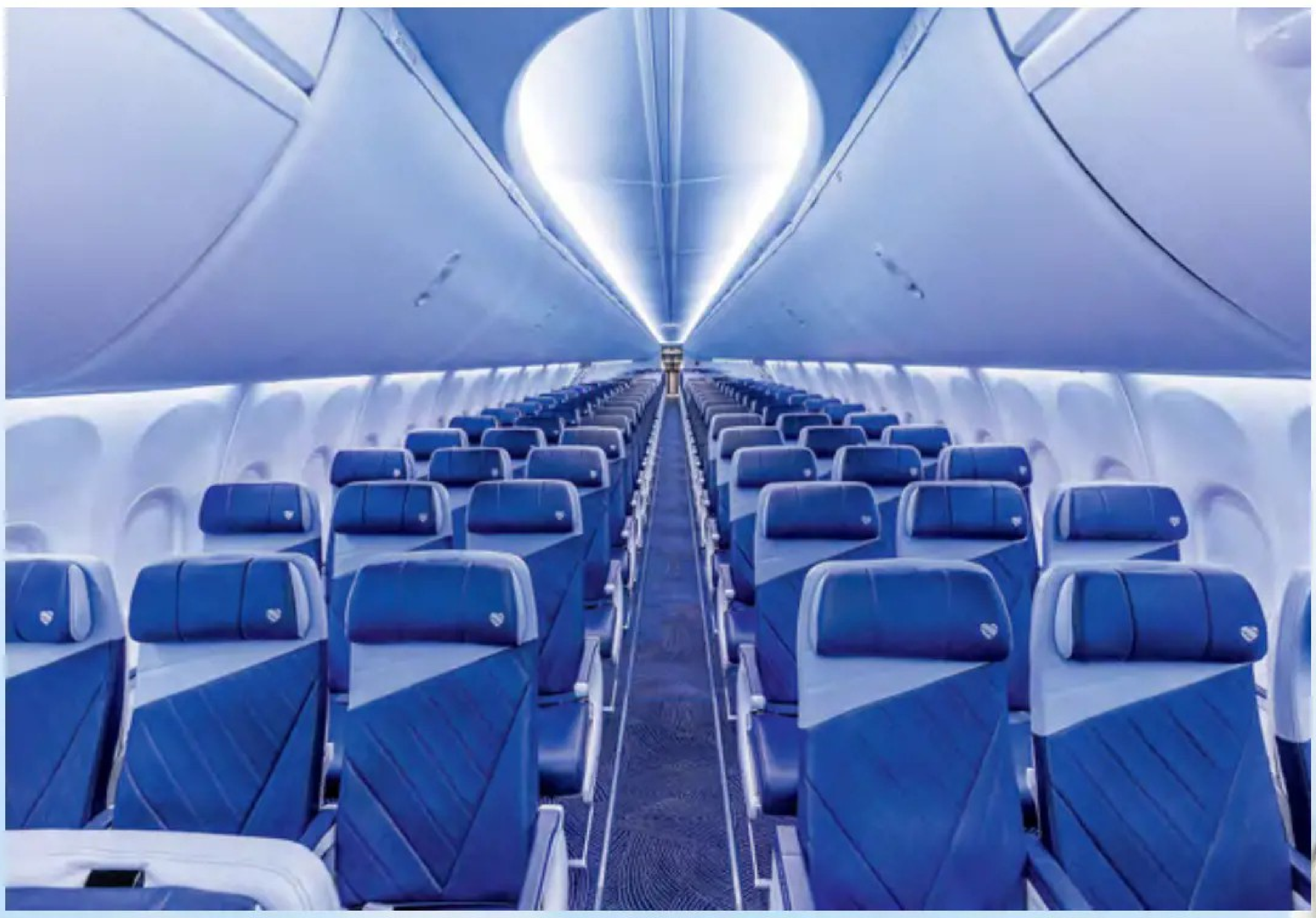
Before the pandemic, budget carriers in the United States were achieving some of the highest profit margins of any of the country's airlines – significantly outpacing their legacy counterparts. Emerging from the pandemic, it was expected that the surge in travel demand would further propel this trend. However, in a reversal of fortunes, several major budget operators have experienced large downturns in their financial results with some even struggling to turn a profit. Key themes affecting results include over capacity in the market, higher fuel prices, softer ticket pricing and higher workforce costs.

Airlines to watch in 2025 include Spirit, Southwest and JetBlue. In November 2024, the former filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection amid mounting losses and looming debt maturities. It hopes to emerge from the process in early 2025. This after renewed merger talks with Frontier Airlines broke down. As reported in the December issue of *Airliner World*, Southwest is facing problems of its own amid slumping profits and an activist investor pushing for change. The carrier has been implementing sweeping changes to its model including dropping its open seating system and introducing 'red eye' flights. JetBlue hasn't posted an annual profit since before the pandemic. Like its rivals, it has struggled in the face of increased competition in an oversupplied domestic market and higher costs.

Capacity caps

Proposals to impose capacity caps at major international airports around the world made headlines during 2024. Whether it's Amsterdam/Schiphol or Dublin, the concept of artificially capping capacity is at odds with the airline industry's desire for growth. The Dutch government proposed cutting flight capacity at Schiphol in 2022, from a maximum of 500,000 movements, down to 440,000. This was overturned in the courts after pressure from the European Commission and US Department of Transportation. In a new plan revealed in September 2024, the Dutch government is now proposing a 3-5% cut (down to between 475,000 and 485,000) being introduced from late 2025 for the winter season. It will be interesting to watch whether this does indeed happen, or if it is overturned again in the courts.

Meanwhile, at Dublin Airport, things are heating up as Ireland's High Court paused the imposition of a controversial passenger cap, which came about from a 2007 planning condition imposed following a terminal expansion, limiting passenger numbers across the two terminals to a total of 32 million per year. Flag carrier Aer Lingus and Ryanair have been among the most vocal opponents of the plan, along with Airlines for America. The airport is working with the local council to increase the limit to 40 million.



RIGHT: ***For the first time in its history, Southwest has decided to assign seating to passengers and offer premium seating options on all flights*** SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

BELOW: ***The Dutch government is now proposing a 3-5% cut in movements at Amsterdam/Schiphol being introduced from late 2025*** AMSTERDAM AIRPORT SCHIPHOL

SUNCLASS
D-A

LEFT: ***Will Airbus be able to deliver more than 800 airliners in one year?*** AIRBUS

Airbus ramp up

European airframer Airbus has its own set of challenges to deal with, which are largely a byproduct of its own sales success. Ramping up production to accelerate deliveries across all of its airliner programmes is a key focus. It's not being helped by the manufacturing sector's well documented supply chain issues, or Boeing's decision to purchase Spirit AeroSystems – a key supplier of assemblies for its A350 and A220 programmes. To counter this, the European firm decided to acquire Spirit's activities relating to its own programmes. This transaction was due to be completed during 2024. Elsewhere, the airframer has been working hard with its suppliers to improve performance. It has inserted its own employees deep into the supply chain to assist where possible.

During 2024, the airframer was forced to trim its annual delivery target down from 800 to 770, which was still above the 2023 total of 735. Will we see a target of more than 800 for 2025? Airbus will be keen to demonstrate a sizable ramp up in production next year, if only to prove to customers that the promised delivery dates can be kept to. Meanwhile, the new A350F is due for service entry in 2026, so we should expect significant progress towards that during 2025.

Riyadh Air flies

One aim of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 programme is to process 330 million passengers annually and connect to more than 250 destinations by the end of the decade. Central to this is turning Riyadh into a long-haul hub, and crucial to that is Riyadh Air. Launched in 2023, the airline is helmed by Tony Douglas, former CEO at Etihad Airways, and owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund.

Currently, it has operated a leased Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, HZ-ARA (c/n 41544), on route proving flights, aiming to obtain its air operators certificate (AOC) before the end of 2024. At the end of October it ordered 60 Airbus A321s, likely to be delivered as two variants from the A321neo, LR and XLR pool. It already has 39 Boeing 787s on firm order, with 33 options.

The route network remains a well-kept secret but the first passengers should fly in the spring of 2025, a soft launch for an airline with firm plans to expand to 100 destinations from Riyadh by 2030. Despite the prospect of stiff competition from established regional carriers, it has already signed agreements with Delta Air Lines, China Eastern Airlines, Saudia, Turkish Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Air China, Virgin Atlantic Airways and Egyptair.

BELOW: ***Riyadh Air hopes to begin commercial operations in the spring of 2025*** RIYADH AIR

RIYADH AIR
طيران الرياض

ABOVE: ***Gatwick's proposal is to relocate the centreline of the northern runway 12m to the north in a £2.2bn privately-funded plan to enable dual runway operations at the Sussex hub***
GATWICK AIRPORT

London runway expansion

It's a political hot potato that has dogged government through the decades – how to increase runway capacity at London's airports.

City processed 5.1 million passengers in 2019 and will expand to eight million by 2030, while Southend hopes to increase capacity from 3.5 to ten million annual passengers. Luton plans to raise passenger numbers from 18 to 32 million per year by 2039 with the addition of a second terminal. All three can achieve this with existing runway infrastructure. Stansted recently embarked on a £1.1bn terminal expansion to lift capacity from 35 to 43 million passengers per year by 2030.

Which leaves Gatwick or Heathrow, or both, or nothing.

A third runway at Heathrow was passed by the House of Commons in 2018. Seven years later, the hub's runways operate at 99% capacity, with passenger numbers expected to attain a record 83 million in 2024, though it forecasts up to 142 million by 2040. Gatwick's proposal is to relocate the centreline of the northern runway 12m to the north in a £2.2bn privately-funded plan to enable dual runway operations. With a decision due early in 2025, it claims to be shovel ready, with an opening planned for 2030, increasing capacity from the 2019 peak of 46.5 million, to 75 million by 2040.

Dash 8 re-imagined

The De Havilland Canada Dash 8-400 remains popular despite production ending in 2021, after delivery of almost 600 examples.

At the Farnborough Airshow last July, the OEM announced a Dash 8 certified refurbishment programme, to purchase and upgrade existing aircraft before selling them on. ANA Holdings, Widerøe, Skyward Express and the Tanzania Government Flight Agency signed for a total of 11 aircraft. While the manufacturer decides whether or not to re-imagine the Dash 8, the plan may form a bridge to the end of the decade. New production facilities at the 1,500-acre De Havilland Field will become operational later this decade, and the final assembly site for the Canadair 515, rebooted DHC-6 Twin Otter Classic 300-G and Dash 8-400 should it return to production. AW

BELOW: ***The Dash 8 certified refurbishment programme was launched at July's Farnborough Airshow***
DE HAVILLAND CANADA

ANA
Inspiration of JAPAN
ANA WINGS
ANA

Connecting canyons *and* capitals

As the closest airport to the Grand Canyon with a commercial air service, Flagstaff/Pulliam has quite the tourist attraction on its doorstep. **Thomas Haynes** travels to the Arizona facility to find out about its unique operation

With the Grand Canyon and a university with 30,000 students on its doorstep, Flagstaff Pulliam Airport (FLG) has all the ingredients of a thriving regional gateway. Situated some 150 miles north and a two- to three-hour drive from Phoenix, the facility is an important asset to the city of Flagstaff, allowing residents easy access to the state capital. For tourists, FLG is the closest airport to the Grand Canyon with a commercial air service and is currently served by American Airlines' regional brand American Eagle.

Situated to the south of the city, the facility caters for both general aviation and airline traffic. With a single runway (21/03) that spans 8,800ft in length and 150ft in width, the site is notable for its elevation, which tops 7,015ft above sea level. On summer days, the density altitude can surpass 10,000ft, which when paired with the high terrain in the vicinity, makes it a complex environment for some aircraft.

The most common visitors to the airport are American Eagle Bombardier CRJ-700s operated by SkyWest Airlines on behalf of American Airlines. The gateway also regularly handles large civil and military types, including Boeing 757s and C-17s.

The terminal building – which opened in 1993 and is positioned at a 45° angle to the runway and single parallel taxiway – offers access to three aircraft parking stands. All the necessary facilities are present inside, including check-in desks (which number three), car rental counters (which outstrip the check-in desks), a single baggage belt, TSA security area with two lanes and a waiting room with two gates.

History

Airline flights to the airport date back to 1948, when the facility was opened. Arizona Airways launched an air service with Douglas DC-3s, but after merging with Frontier Airlines in 1950, the Convair CV-340 and CV-580 began to make appearances. During the 1950s and 1960s, air service expanded to include direct flights to Denver, Colorado via Gallup in New Mexico, Farmington, New Mexico, and »

BELOW: ***Flagstaff's single runway 21/03 measures 8,800ft in length*** FLAGSTAFF AIRPORT

LEFT: ***The old terminal building at the airport*** FLAGSTAFF AIRPORT

FLAGSTAFF PULLIAM AIRPORT
EST. 1948

LEFT: ***The facility was opened on July 30, 1948*** ALL IMAGES KEY-THOMAS HAYNES UNLESS STATED

Durango, Colorado. However, Frontier flights came to an end in 1979.

During this time and through to the early 1980s, several commuter carriers played a crucial role in connecting Flagstaff primarily to Phoenix. These included Cochise Airlines, Desert Air Service, Desert Pacific Airlines, Sun West Airlines and SkyWest Airlines. Aircraft ranging from Fairchild Swearingen Metroliners and Beechcraft C99s to De Havilland Canada DHC-6 Twin Otters, Cessna 402s and Piper Navajos were a common sight at the airport during this period.

American Eagle, operated by Wings West Airlines, represented American Airlines in Flagstaff from 1986 to 1987, using Metroliners for flights to Phoenix. Meanwhile, America West Airlines made its entrance in 1987, operating De Havilland Canada DHC-8 Dash 8s. Flights to the carrier's hubs in Phoenix and Las Vegas, with the latter making a stop at Grand Canyon National Park Airport, followed. On the occasions, Flagstaff would be treated to the use of Boeing 737-200s by America West, which would fill in as a back-up for the Dash 8s. The operation was handed over to Phoenix-based Mesa Airlines in 1992, which flew Beechcraft 1900Ds and Embraer EMB120 Brasilias, flying as America West Express between FLG and Phoenix.

By 1996, the airport saw up to 16 daily flights to the state capital, with one departing every hour. The services were upgauged to the Dash 8 in 1998. Following America West's merger with US Airways in 2007, the flights were rebranded as US Airways Express.

A significant milestone for Flagstaff came in 2012, when all of its flights were upgraded to the 50-seat Bombardier CRJ-200, signifying the first time in its history that jet aircraft were regularly scheduled to serve the airport. Following the 2015 merger

BELOW: ***The terminal in use today opened in 1993***

SKYLANE TC
N252QC

ABOVE: *In addition to airline traffic, the airport has a sizeable GA population*

of US Airways with American Airlines, American Eagle service returned to FLG. The Phoenix flights received a further upgrade in 2017, when the CRJ-200 was swapped out for the larger 70-seat CRJ-700, operated by SkyWest Airlines. During 2018, a single Saturday flight to Los Angeles was added, utilising a CRJ-700 operated by SkyWest as American Eagle. United Airlines joined the line-up in 2019, when it launched a daily flight to Denver using Embraer ERJ145s. The service ended in October 2022.

Current picture

At present, American Eagle is the airport's only airline partner and offers a daily flight to Dallas/Fort Worth, four to five daily services to Phoenix/Sky Harbor and a weekly Saturday connection to Los Angeles, which returned after a hiatus in October 2024.

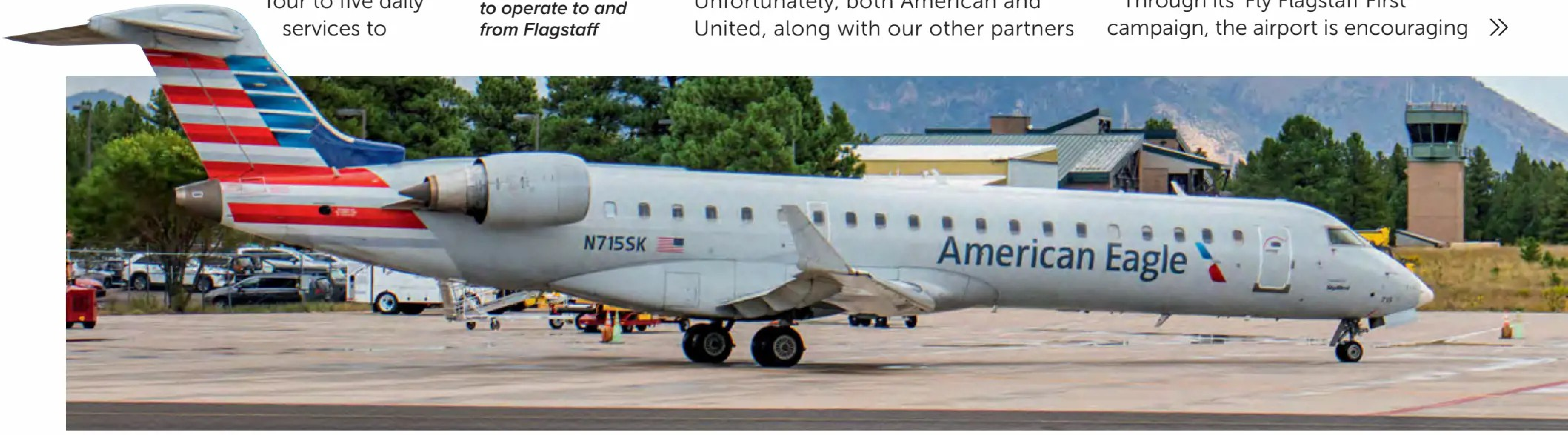
Despite having the Grand Canyon on its doorstep, and a thriving city of more than 70,000 residents, airport management say there's one thing that is holding them back, although it is out of their control.

Brian Gall, director of Flagstaff Airport, explained: "The major challenge we're facing at the moment is the regional airline pilot shortage. The United [Denver] service here was very successful with an 83% load factor in the final year of operation and as many as three flights a day to Denver. Unfortunately, both American and United, along with our other partners that haven't flown to Flagstaff before, have shifted a lot of their pilots to their mainline operations, where they can fly more passengers with the same number of crew, so we're feeling the effects of that."

The number of American flights is slightly reduced from where it was three or four years ago but, as demonstrated by the reintroduction of the Los Angeles service, FLG is starting to see it tick back up. Gall said more than five million tourists visit the region each year, but because of the airport's proximity to Phoenix, it suffers a 78% 'leakage rate' to Sky Harbor, meaning that 78% of the people who want to arrive in Flagstaff are choosing to fly to Phoenix and then drive up.

Through its 'Fly Flagstaff First' campaign, the airport is encouraging »

BELOW: *The Bombardier CRJ-700 is the only airliner regularly scheduled to operate to and from Flagstaff*



locals to consider travelling through FLG when they're flying out. The facility's director also believes that by adding a second airline, customer choice will increase, lowering ticket prices – which are currently marginally higher than Phoenix, which is typical for regional airports compared to major US hubs. However, the author found that on a connecting international itinerary via Phoenix beginning in London, the leg to Flagstaff made no real difference to the overall price.

In a move to sweeten any possible airline deal, airport management have applied for federal funding to help with revenue and advertising support for a new air carrier at the facility. Gall said he had had conversations with "a number of different air carriers", and that he was hoping to get additional air service "mostly to places north and northeast of Flagstaff."

LEFT: ***Flagstaff's Airport Rescue Fire Fighting (ARFF) and Operations team provides 24-hour year-round coverage***

American
WILD
FLAGSTAFF

LEFT: ***The terminal's check-in area has three counters***

American Ea
5SK

BELOW: ***Bombardier CRJ-701ER, N715SK (c/n 10179), takes off from runway 21 at Flagstaff***

Around 80,000 passengers travelled through FLG during 2024. As a result of the pilot shortage and a reduction in flights, this figure is down on the all-time record of 124,000 in 2019. "I think that that's a position we could find ourselves in again very soon," admitted Gall. "I don't think it's going to take a lot of things to go our way before we start to see numbers near where we were at our peak."

Throughout its recent history, legacy carriers have dominated the airline offering at FLG, so could there be a place for a low-cost operator? Brian Gall thinks so: "In fact we've had conversations with some of them. However, some of the challenges we face are that a lot of our traffic is tourist traffic and the low-cost carriers tend to fly between one and three times per week, which can make scheduling a little bit challenging. Also, in our case, being as close as we are to Phoenix/Sky Harbor, I could see some of those passengers opting to fly to Phoenix instead of coming here, but I do think that there's an opportunity for a low-cost carrier to come to a place like Flagstaff."

Another challenge for the airport that rolls around like clockwork every year is winter. The facility's positioning at high elevation means that clearing snow is a major part of daily operations during the colder months. Gall said: "We have a lot of sunny days punctuated by really intense snowfall. We might get four to six inches, maybe even up to a foot sometimes, and then some sunny days after that. Moving that volume of snow in a short period of time can be challenging. We frequently get snowfall rates that exceed two inches an hour. With the amount of

FedEx
N880FE
FedEx Feeder
The World On Time

pavement we have out here, keeping the equipment staffed, keeping people on top of it to stop the snow from getting too deep is the main point of emphasis for us."

With the pilot shortage impacting current operations, where does the airport director think the facility will be in a decade's time? "In ten years, I could easily see us in a position where we have an additional carrier or two, and our enplanements moving up to somewhere in the mid-100 region. That's going to trigger the need for some things like terminal expansion projects and those take some time to get off the ground. So I'm not sure if that will be done in ten years, but I could see us being pretty far on the planning stage on some of that, along with the increased amount of traffic that would entail."

With its cosy and intimate feel, FLG has everything a passenger would want. Now it just needs more flight options, which is something management are working very hard to achieve.

ABOVE: ***FedEx Feeder operates cargo flights between Phoenix/Sky Harbor and Flagstaff***

WE HAVE THE ANSWERS!
Best Trails
Great Eats
Star Viewing
Night Life & More

RIGHT: ***There's no searching around for the correct baggage carousel at Flagstaff as it only has one!***

American Eagle

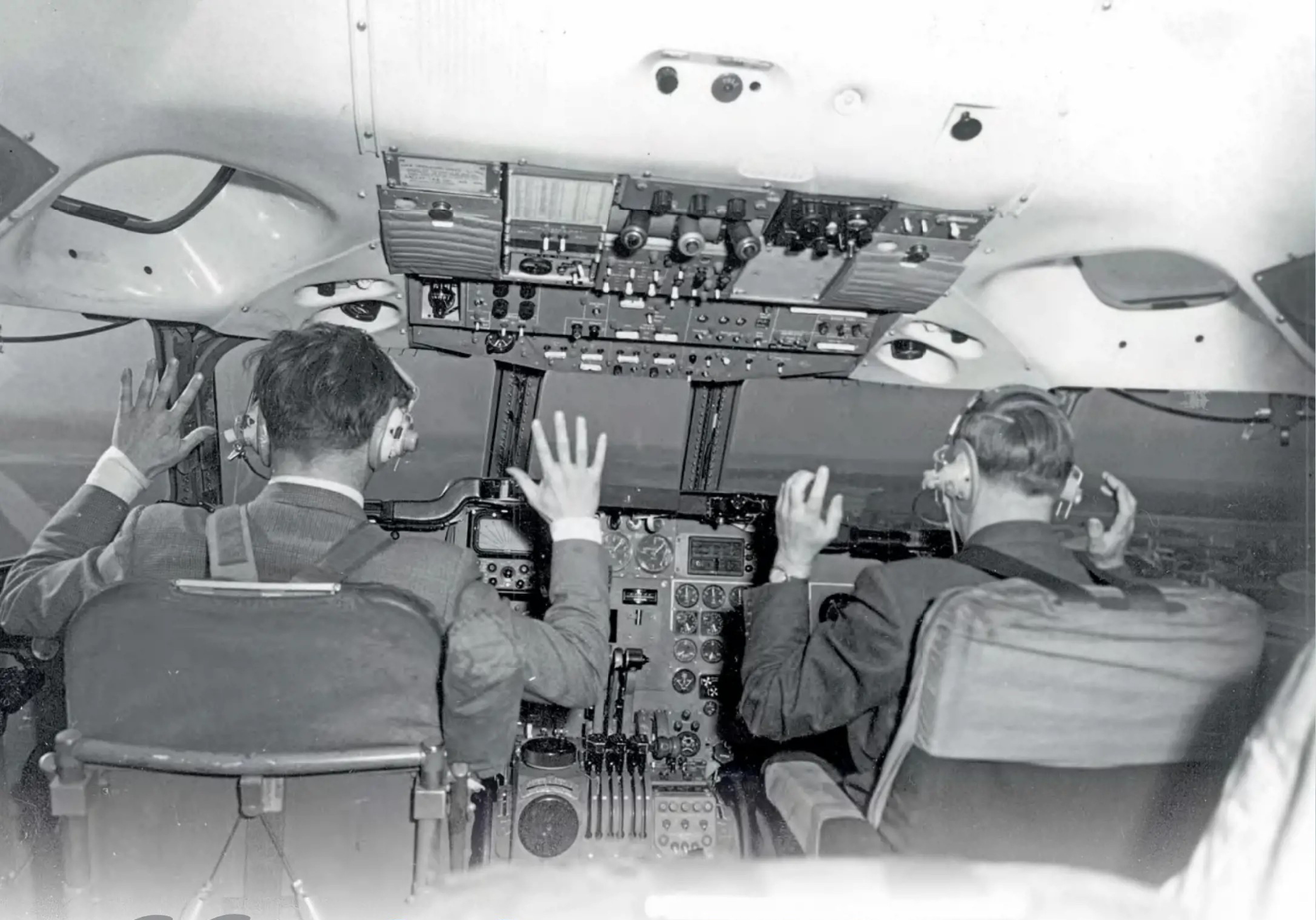
RIGHT: ***The author's ride for the return flight to Phoenix, American Eagle CRJ-701ER, N702SK (c/n 10136), is prepared for departure***

Flagstaff experience

The author travelled through Flagstaff to reach the Grand Canyon in early September 2024. After touching down, passengers deplane onto the tarmac and then walk the short distance to the arrivals door, which then leads straight into the baggage reclaim area. There was no searching around for the correct carousel and very minimal waiting time for the bags. The car rental counters are perfectly positioned on the other side of the room, then it's a short stroll to the car park, which is positioned about 100ft from the terminal exit door. The whole experience – which was extremely smooth – lasted no more than 20 minutes.

For the author's departure from Flagstaff, a visit was paid to the check-in desks located at the western end of the terminal. The agent manning the desk – who would later don a hi-vis vest and assume ground crew duties – explained the slightly different bag check process, which involves passengers placing their suitcases on a metal roller track and pushing them through a hole in the wall themselves. There was no queue for the TSA security and, in a matter of minutes, we were in the departure lounge awaiting the aircraft's arrival. Once the aircraft had parked, the large windows offered a front row seat to watch all aspects of the turnaround at close range. It was even possible to spot our bags being loaded on the aircraft. It wasn't long before boarding commenced and we were on our way to Phoenix/Sky Harbor.

Having also driven between Phoenix and Flagstaff during my trip, I can safely say that flying was significantly more enjoyable.



ABOVE: ***Test pilots Jimmy Phillips (left) and Pat Fillingham hold their hands up to demonstrate the hands-off autoland system on Trident 1C, G-ARPB (c/n 2102), in 1964***
KEY COLLECTION

"LOOK MA, NO HANDS!"

The advent of autoland for airliners was a huge leap forward, enabling safe operations in poor weather. **Robin Evans** explores the history of its development and details the operational considerations

The flight deck is quiet and, with the windows blanketed in thick grey, there is little sensation of movement beyond the gently unspooling altimeters, steady distance countdown and the firm cadence of an occasional automated callout. The tower reports conditions typical of high atmospheric pressure in winter: nil wind and a visibility of 200 metres in freezing fog. Waiting at the hold point, the next departing crew may just glimpse this landing aircraft as a ghostly interruption to the runway lights.

The only clue to how this is being achieved is audible to the first few rows aboard: the autopilot disconnection warning sounds *after* landing. The aircraft has just landed itself, albeit under heavy supervision, and the slowest part – taxiing to the gate – now begins. In service for 60 years, without the refined capability of autolanding, the crew and passengers would otherwise have been diverted potentially hundreds of miles away to the designated alternate airport, a costly disruption for all.

Fogs

Aviation is as interested in air temperature as its associated dew point. When both equalise, air becomes saturated with water vapour, visible as cloud or progressively as mist, then fog. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) defines fog as obscurity in atmospheric surface layers caused by suspended water droplets (not dry particulates like dust or smoke) reducing horizontal visibility below 1000m.

The typical European variety is radiation fog (as opposed to frontal weather systems or moist air settling over cold water, such as the conditions forming San Francisco's famous advection fogs). It is named for the heat loss through radiation into the atmosphere on clear nights. This is typical of atmospheric high pressure in summer and particularly damp, winter air, with minimal wind mixing.

The ultimate principle of instrument flight is that it is not dependent on seeing where you are going, except briefly at take-off and particularly when landing. As the Wright

Brothers' small steps evolved into giant leaps, pilots would increasingly encounter the threat known today as instrument meteorological conditions (IMC). Initially described as generic 'fogs', early aviation had not yet differentiated between cloud formation – condensation of moisture – at ground level versus altitude.

The development of US Air Mail routes demonstrated the harsh reality of a fledgling commercial schedule compromised without an all-weather capability. In his year of airmail tenure before making 1927 transatlantic history, Charles Lindbergh twice baled out after becoming fog-bound. Since you can't land visually on an unseen runway, it became imperative to develop a way to land blind in fog using 'electronic eyes'.

Groundwork

Autolanding ultimately depends on external, two-dimensional (vertical and horizontal) guidance, initially for pilots to follow manually. The conventional precision approach offered at all major airports, the Instrument Landing System (ILS), is the worldwide standard. Two large ground antennas define horizontal (localiser) and vertical (glideslope) planes by emitting paired radio energy lobes, their degree of overlap indicating displacement from centre.

The German Lorenz Beam and particularly, American Signal Corps System (SCS) evolved rapidly in the wartime 'Battle of the Beams'. An early British set-up, the Blind Approach Beam System (BABS) provided horizontal guidance with vertical instruction via conventional radio.

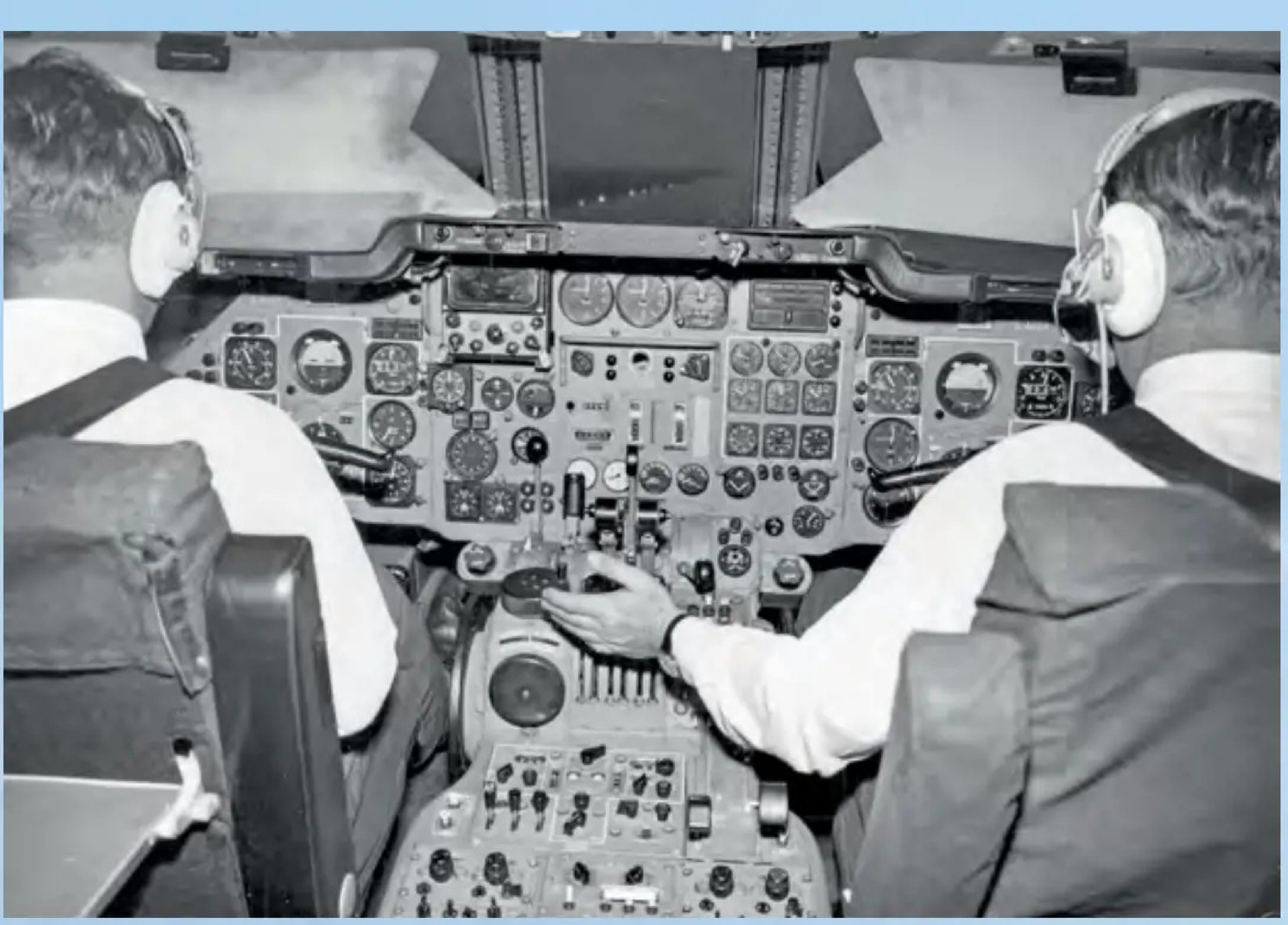
Early versions indicated horizontal beam displacement to the pilot by variable audio tones, both dimensions were later incorporated visually by an analogue gauge. The American SCS became the basis of our ILS, accepted by ICAO in 1948. System resolution was defined by a given beam deviation being sensed and indicated, then perceived and corrected by the pilot. This informed today's manually flown limits and offered a glimpse of the future.

Anticipating the Jet Age in fog-bound Europe, the Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE) turned towards »

BEA
Trident Three
G-AWYZ

BELOW: ***Hawker Siddeley Trident was the first airliner to incorporate autoland functionality by design***
KEY COLLECTION

LEFT: ***A Trident autolands at Heathrow during trials on the foggy morning of November 4, 1966***
KEY COLLECTION



LEFT: ***The view in the cockpit of a Trident 2E, G-AVFA (c/n 2140), the first airliner equipped with triplex autoland, as it touches down. The pilots' views are blocked by screens, but the runway lights can be seen through the centre panel***
KEY COLLECTION

automatic approaches. The Blind Landing Experimental Unit (BLEU) was founded in 1946 for developing military and civil capability, becoming resident at RAE Bedford from 1957.

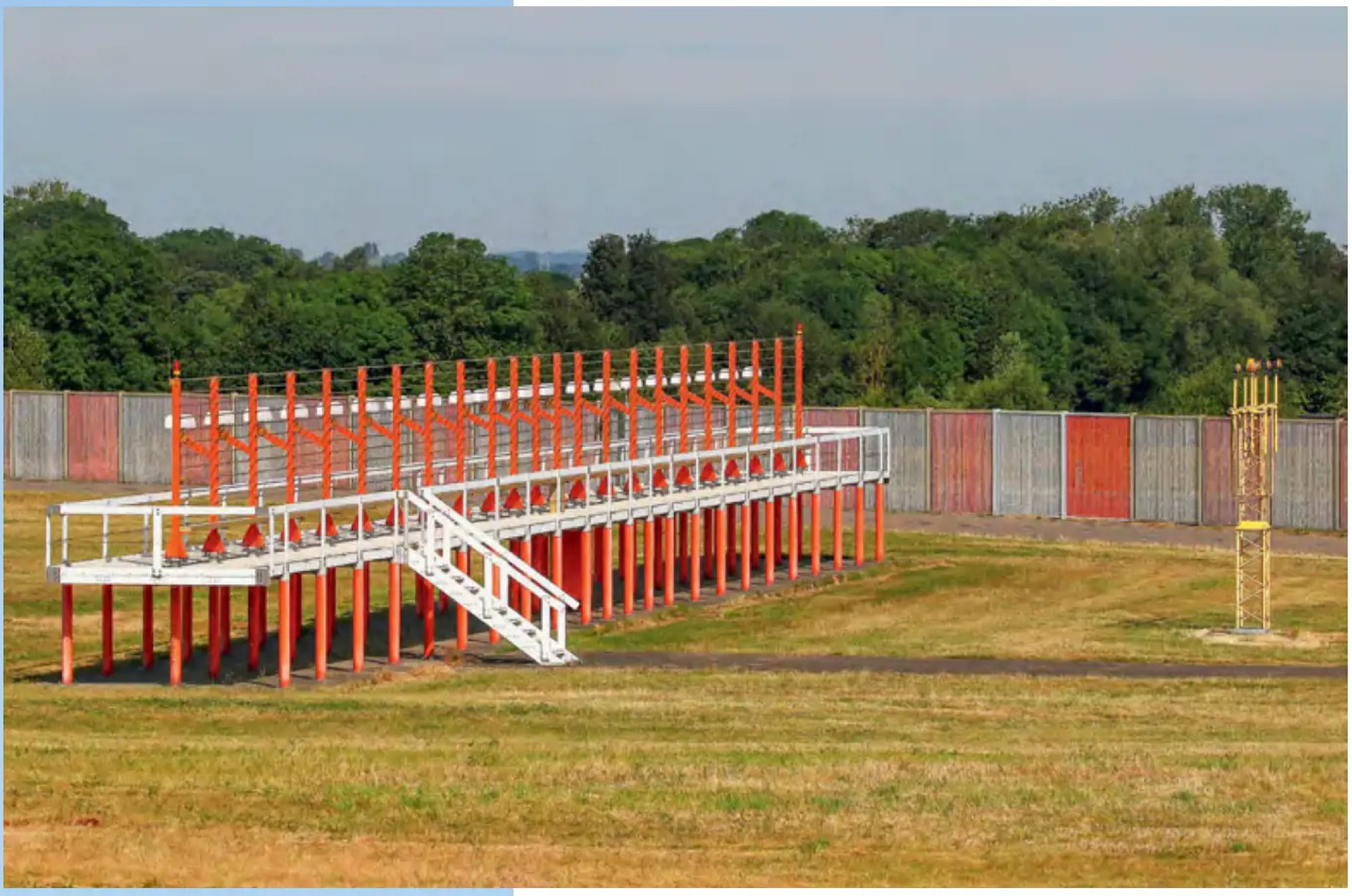
The BLEU initially defined a localiser with a buried leader cable, an equivalent of the marine system installed in New York's Ambrose Channel in the 1920s. An electromagnetic field created by miles of undersea cable was sensed by induction coils hung overboard, with signal strength defining a track in sea fog. However, the critical nature of landing an aircraft required an independent vertical check. Lacking the fidelity for an aircraft to deduce precisely and rapidly how high it was barometrically (a millibar of atmospheric pressure is approximately equal to 30ft), the landing flare became augmented by a radio altimeter.

Revolution

Vital elements that needed to be considered were a signal to indicate component failure, crosswind de-crabbing and providing an optimum transition from internal to external visual cues. Still used today, a lighting rig of crossbars replicating runway perspective, the Calvert Array, was designed by Farnborough research scientist E Calvert and was agreed with ICAO in 1949. As even approach lights would not be visible for the highest autoland category in the thickest fog, runways required high intensity end, edge and centreline lighting, plus lights installed in the touchdown zone surface.

G-ARPR
BEA
Trident
G-ARPC
BEA

BELOW: ***BEA was particularly keen on autolanding, actively marketing its usefulness in disruptive, foggy winters***
KEY COLLECTION



ABOVE: ***An ILS localiser array provides the lateral guidance for an autoland***
AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ RUDI BOIGELOT

Despite pilot resistance and US pressure for synthetic indications (head-up displays are now optional on the latest generation of airliners), the BLEU concluded that what was needed was a fully automatic system that was not reliant on manual pilot response. This required coupling powered controls into multi-axis feedback loops, accelerated by avionics partnerships, which would mean pilots would be free to focus on monitoring and decision-making.

Initially, pilots maintained roll and yaw into the touchdown zone, but this was later coupled to the localiser. The pitch channel would revert to attitude freeze at a nominated radio height, typically 130ft, as wind variation thereafter was deemed negligible. At 60ft, the flare computer took over the pitch channel, assessing radio height against rate of change to raise the nose. Thrust was reduced sooner than the earliest systems that idled on wheel strut compression, and the yaw channel returned to the pilot like any crosswind landing.

This 'no hands' routine was demonstrated to Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, in an English Electric Canberra in 1959. BLEU superintendent John Charnley had voiced his unease about the Canberra's single-channel military set-up. Though apparently impressed, there is no record of what the Duke actually said. While an uninformed outsider might have assumed it to be an affront to pilot skill, wouldn't a keen pilot, technology advocate, supporter of British industry and naval officer have appreciated the possibilities for the burgeoning Jet Age and Cold War?

In triplicate

The official requirement for an all-weather landing capability on the Avro Vulcan arose in 1954, motivated by returning warheads home. After five years of work, it became the first quadjet to autoland on December 22, 1959, and its single-channel system was certified in 1961. With authorities specifying a far more stringent civil failure rate of no more than one in ten million, the system needed redesigning as a multiplex. The Vickers VC10 employed a dual system with a constant evaluation loop and auto-changeover.

The first jet airliner built with autoland from the outset was the Hawker Siddeley HS-121 Trident, which had triple circuits throughout, including engines, hydraulics and Smiths autopilots, which worked simultaneously for automatic approaches. Beneath the flight deck, its advanced avionics led to the rare, offset nose gear.

British European Airways (BEA) was particularly keen on autolanding, actively marketing their defence against disruptive, foggy winters. Exacerbated by coal-fired power stations in the European network, suspended atmospheric particles serve as condensation nuclei to which vapour adhered.

A Trident made the first autolanding by a production airliner at Bedford »

BELOW: ***An aircraft descends through the fog while on approach to Glasgow***
ALAMY STOCK PHOTO/ DC NEWSFEED

ABOVE: ***This Etihad Airways Boeing 777-300ER is conducting an autoland, indicated by the LAND 3 (dual autopilot redundancy to Cat 3) with ROLLOUT and FLARE annunciators on the primary flight display*** AVIATION IMAGE NETWORK/BAILEY

RIGHT: ***ICAO defines fog as an obscurity in atmospheric surface layers caused by suspended water droplets reducing horizontal visibility below 1000m*** AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/MAURITS VINK

in 1963. Trident 1C, G-ARPR (c/n 2119), pioneered it commercially on June 10, 1965, from Paris/Le Bourget to London/Heathrow. Captain Eric Poole, a Battle of Britain veteran, made aviation history by not physically landing the aircraft himself. Scheduled in advance rather than due to meteorologic necessity, it was announced to everyone aboard and they were presented with certificates which commemorated "the world's first commercial passenger aircraft to make an automatic touch-down."

Years of research and development would be distilled into the simple slogan 'Look no hands', reinforced by footage of a pilot explaining the system to camera all the way to touchdown. Invaluable publicity occurred on November 25, 1966, when Trident 1C, G-ARPB (c/n 2102), with BEA CEO Henry Marking aboard became the only arrival at a foggy Heathrow all day. By November 1967, BEA declared there had been 60,000 autolanding passengers, then 100,000 by July 1968 and 500,000 by April 1970. In the two decades since their first attempt with the BLEU in 1948, Smiths declared there had been more than 20,000 autolands.

All-weather operations

An ILS enables descent to a Decision Altitude (DA) for a manual landing or missed approach, to the lowest 'Cat 1' minima of 200ft cloud base and 550m visibility. Airports will enforce Low Visibility Procedures (LVPs) before this, indicating that autoland is now required. Because take-off and landing certification varies by fleet, operator, crew qualification and airport capability, multiple minima may be published. Crews have to plan for the most restrictive common denominator; aircraft that are certified or dispatched at Cat 2 cannot use higher category landing minima.

Beneath the aft fuselage – the lowest point in the landing attitude – the radio altimeters indicate height above the surface. The 'minimum' point becomes a radio altimeter Decision Height (DH), not a barometric DA. Runway visual range (RVR) is measured by transmissometers alongside the runway, given with every clearance.

Several landing categories (Cat 2 and Cat 3A) permit incrementally reducing RVR and DHs, with Cat 3B requiring no visual references and therefore no DH, down to a minimum 75m RVR.

ups
Worldwide Services

When air temperature and dewpoint equalise, air becomes saturated with water vapour, visible as cloud or progressively as mist, then fog V1IMAGES.COM/STEVE RINDE

Autolanding is not universally available and is usually absent at airports where an ILS is not cost-effective, only certified to Cat 1, or fitted in one direction GETTY IMAGES/NUR PHOTO/NICOLAS ECONOMOU

Generally, the greater the redundancy of air and ground elements, the fewer lights are required to be seen. A flight deck reference mark indicates pilot eye-height for optimum view over the nose and landing lights may be kept off to avoid creating distracting water droplet reflections.

With sufficient time, downgrading to a lower category can be managed on approach, otherwise requiring go-around and reassessment. At lower altitudes, system errors trigger a warning for immediate go-around. Flare mode engages at a fleet-specific radio height, announced by a callout, then crosswind drift is neutralised to the ILS bearing. Systems and minima permitting, some aircraft can maintain the centreline during rollout using the localiser antenna - fitted at the far end of the runway. Targeting a particular turn-off, the autopilot is disconnected to leave the centreline.

Though proven by the Trident, Cat 3C (zero-zero cloud base at ground level with zero RVR) is unused today, with the Cat 3B RVR of 75m being the minimum to taxi. The latest generation airliners offer moving map displays, otherwise navigation is eased by standardised lighting and signage, with turn-offs in alternating amber/green lights and taxiways with green. The ground controller expects a slower taxi and often requests to report 'on stand'.

Magic

Autolanding is not universally available and is usually absent at airports where an ILS is not cost-effective, or else only certified to Cat 1, or fitted in one direction. Especially during winter operation, fog causes delays because procedures require fewer movements, extra checks enforcing a protected zone around the ILS antennae and slower taxi speeds. Without visual cues, airport protections and considerations increase.

There is also a cost to install, maintain and power the additional generator and lighting infrastructure. Increasingly proven GPS approaches might appear economically attractive, but cannot yet match ILS all-weather minima, preclude autoland potential and remain subject to GPS signal sensitivities.

Autolanding reinforces public misunderstanding that an autopilot does everything. While this is superficially true – they manipulate controls to a programmed flightpath via pilot-selected modes – they cannot think and have reduced capability in technical downgrades. They are a legal necessity to autoland, as are two monitoring pilots anticipating the flight path, considering limits on the day, briefing actions and preparing contingency plans. There is a parallel with automated cars in the unappreciated gap between automation of basic tasks to reduce the workload of a monitoring driver and true autonomous operation.

Developed at great effort from rough beginnings, seamlessly switching to all-weather operations is a facet of the flexibly robust modern procedures underpinning safe, dependable aviation. As the most complex combination of aircraft systems and human procedures, author Arthur C Clarke's Third Law that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic could apply nicely to autolanding.

BELOW: ***In winter operations, fog causes delays because procedures require fewer movements, extra checks enforcing a protected zone around the ILS antennas and slower taxi speeds*** THOMAS HAYNES

A breath of fresh aer

Lee Cross heads to Dublin to chat with **Ian Lough**, head of commercial at Emerald Airlines, to see how the carrier is progressing three years after taking over the Aer Lingus Regional franchise

ABOVE: ***Emerald Airlines ATR 72-600, EI-HDI (c/n 1087)*** **St Darerca/Darerca,** ***was delivered to the airline in July 2022, on lease from Chorus Aviation*** AVIATION IMAGE NETWORK/BAILEY

For many years, Irish flag carrier Aer Lingus partnered with Aer Arann (later Stobart Air) to feed passengers onto its transatlantic flights under the Aer Lingus Regional brand. But, in November 2020, the airline announced that an unknown start-up called Emerald Airlines would take over the contract from 2023. Emerald was established by Irish aviation tycoon Conor McCarthy, who founded the maintenance, repair and overhaul provider Dublin Aerospace in 2009.

Stobart Air, already in a precarious financial position, collapsed in June 2021, leaving Aer Lingus without a regional partner. The airline, along with British Airways (BA) franchise BA CityFlyer, was brought in to operate several routes on a short-term basis, but many more were cancelled. Talks were immediately entered with Emerald management to see if the March 2023 start date could be brought forward.

"We've had a solid relationship with Aer Lingus from the outset," explained Ian Lough, Emerald's head of commercial, in an exclusive interview with *Airliner World* at the carrier's Dublin headquarters. "It's a long-term arrangement, and there are lots of great synergies there."

Take off

Shortly after signing a formal commercial agreement with Aer Lingus on August 4, 2021, the airline received its maiden ATR 72-600, EI-GPP (c/n 1322) *St. Ita/Ide*, the first of six on lease from Chorus Aviation Capital. On September 3, a route-proving flight from Dublin to Cork was conducted, and Emerald was awarded its air operator's certificate (AOC) from the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) a few days later. McCarthy said at the time: "Being granted the first AOC in Ireland since the pandemic is not only a major milestone in our journey as an airline but a significant one for the Irish aviation industry as it begins its recovery following the worst crisis in its history."

On February 26, 2022, Emerald Airlines, operating as Aer Lingus Regional, took to the skies for the

EMERALD AIRLINES FLEET LIST

Reg'n	Type	C/n	Delivery date	Name	Notes
EI-GPP	ATR 72-600	1322	04/08/2021	St. Ita/Ide	Formerly Flybe
EI-GPN	ATR 72-600	1300	22/11/2021	St Tiernan/Tigernach	Formerly Flybe
EI-GPO	ATR 72-600	1315	23/02/2022	St Foillan/Faolán	Formerly Flybe
EI-FSL	ATR 72-600	1339	25/03/2022	St Elvis/Ailbhe	Formerly Stobart Air
EI-GZV	ATR 72-600	1107	27/04/2022	St Colgan/ Colchu	Formerly Virgin Australia Regional
EI-HDH	ATR 72-600	1169	25/05/2022	St Colgan/Colchu	Formerly Virgin Australia Regional
EI-HDK	ATR 72-600	1334	10/06/2022	St Mainchin/Mainchín	Formerly TransNusa
EI-HDI	ATR 72-600	1087	08/07/2022	St Darerca/Darerca	Formerly Virgin Australia Regional
EI-FAT	ATR 72-600	1097	16/09/2022	St Fursey/Fursa	Formerly Aer Arann
EI-FAV	ATR 72-600	1105	27/09/2022	St. Eithne/Ethna	Formerly Aer Arann
EI-HNA	ATR 72-600	1321	27/04/2024	St Saran/Saran	Formerly Garuda Indonesia
G-CMJN	ATR 72-600	1471	05/10/2022	St Caillín/Caillín	Delivered to Emerald Airlines in April 2022 as EI-GZY
G-CMJM	ATR 72-600	1464	10/01/2023	St Coman/Cóman	Delivered to Emerald Airlines in March 2022 as EI-GZW
G-CMJL	ATR 72-600	1326	06/02/2023	St Dermot/Diarmaid	Delivered to Emerald Airlines in April 2022 as EI-FSK
G-CMJJ	ATR 72-600	1324	22/03/2023	St Foila/Foila	Delivered to Emerald Airlines in May 2022 as EI-HDJ
G-CMMK	ATR 72-600	1297	23/03/2023	St Secundinus/Sechniall	Formerly Stobart Air
G-CMMN	ATR 72-600	1069	28/04/2023	St Senior/Senach	Formerly Villa Air
G-CMMT	ATR 72-600	1109	21/09/2023	St Murghal/Murghal	Formerly Villa Air

EMERALD AIRLINES INFORMATION

IATA:	EA
ICAO:	EAI/EAG
CALLSIGN:	GEMSTONE/GREENSTONE
BASES:	Dublin/Belfast City
HEADQUARTERS:	Dublin Airport, Dublin, Ireland

first time, flying the public service obligation (PSO) flight between Dublin and Donegal an incredible ten months ahead of schedule. The airline hit the ground running, offering over 340 weekly flights across 11 routes, including services to Glasgow and Edinburgh up to four times per day from the Irish capital. Lough explained that these high-frequency rotations are a key part of the airline's operation, feeding into Aer Lingus' transatlantic waves throughout the day.

Next came the task of securing a UK AOC to launch flights in March 2022 to several destinations across the UK mainland from George Best/Belfast City airport, with whom it had signed a long-term deal to establish a base. However, the certificate took longer than expected, meaning aircraft ready to go onto the UK register were kept in limbo. Instead, ATRs from its Irish AOC had to operate the schedules, which had a knock-on effect on the carrier's Dublin expansion plans.

Lough explained: "The delays in obtaining the AOC from the UK's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) meant that we had some flight schedules that we had to cancel last minute." Finally, on December 7, Emerald UK was launched, and the first aircraft, G-CMJN (c/n 1471) *St Caillín/Caillín*, was put to work connecting Belfast with Glasgow and Southampton.

While two AOCs offer the airline the ability to base aircraft in southern and Northern Ireland, it also "drives complexity", as Lough explained: "We have issues whereby, if we have a crew shortage in one base, we can't use crew from another. There's no flexibility, which is one of the hangups from Brexit." However, Lough said that the benefits of having the two AOCs far outweigh any negatives, adding: "A lot of hard work went into securing both."

The impact of the scheduled changes, coupled with the start-up costs and increased levels of disruption, led the airline to post a "very much expected" pre-tax loss for the first year of its operations. "But for year three, the financial year we're in now, we're expected to make a profit," Lough said. "That's a testament to »

LEFT: ***Ian Lough, Emerald Airlines head of commercial***
ALL IMAGES EMERALD AIRLINES UNLESS STATED

ABOVE: ***The airline operated its maiden flight on February 26, 2022, on the PSO route between Dublin and Donegal***

the dedication everyone has in the company. We have now proved the viability of the airline."

Early expansion

While financial rewards may have been slow to materialise, Emerald's early expansion was swift and successful. Less than a year after commencing operations, the airline welcomed its millionth passenger on a flight from Dublin to Southampton. The demise of Flybe MK.II also allowed it to expand its presence further in Belfast, taking over the routes to Newcastle and East Midlands, and immediately adding an extra 15,000 seats from the facility.

"Aer Lingus Regional is now the largest it has ever been," Lough revealed. "The relationship with Aer Lingus is working really well. We still see so much potential to grow our point-to-point network and strengthen our connecting passenger proposition, which is very attractive because of the US immigration pre-clearance at Dublin."

Indeed, utilising the "well respected" Aer Lingus brand has been critical to the airline's success, with Lough stating that it had taken the airline to where it is today. From the outset, the two carriers have worked very closely, aligning schedules as best they can to ensure the best connectivity for passengers. "From an Aer Lingus perspective, we are very focused on trying to offer high-frequency service to smaller markets that wouldn't necessarily support mainline Aer Lingus flights."

Emerald flies to 20 destinations from Dublin and Belfast, two distinct and different markets. "If you look at Dublin, for example, it's very much about connecting Aer Lingus, and on most of our routes, we compete with Ryanair. Meanwhile, Belfast is about offering high-frequency services to key markets for business and leisure passengers. But here, too, we compete with Ryanair and, to a greater extent, easyJet and their operation at Belfast International. But we have a very different product from our competitors and compete effectively in both markets."

Lough added that the airline had a great relationship with all the airports it flies to. "We try and work really closely with all of our airports to understand how we can help drive connectivity and how we can improve the levels of passengers that we are carrying, and airports see value in having us there."

Part of this was the launch of its first seasonal services outside the UK and Ireland market from Dublin to Brest in May 2023 and Rennes in northern France a year later. "That's the furthest we fly to, and we are limited with the range of our ATRs," said Lough. "However, that's not to say we wouldn't consider expanding our route map. If Aer Lingus were to identify opportunities for strong transatlantic connectivity, we would work with them to explore these routes further."

Spreading its wings

While Emerald is intrinsically linked to the Irish flag carrier, Lough explained that it remains a commercially independent company. "We do our

BELOW: ***Emerald Airlines UK first ATR 72-600, G-CMJN (c/n 1471)* St Caillín/Caillín**
AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ SIMON WILSON

Emerald Airlines

LEFT: *The airline has its headquarters at Dublin Airport*

BELOW: *Lough said that the ATR 72 was an ideal aircraft for Emerald Airlines' type of operation*

revenue management. We do our own marketing. We have our own ground handling and catering and carry out maintenance in-house. But when we are growing routes, it's always good to engage with them [Aer Lingus] because they have a long understanding of the market and know where there may be underserved routes that would be best placed for our aircraft."

Lough stated that the company views the franchise as a "long-term" deal. But as profits start to materialise, he added that the airline was open to exploring other business opportunities.

Between May 20 and September 29 this year, Emerald wet-leased one of its ATR 72s to BA to operate a seasonal service from London/Gatwick to Dublin. The twice-daily flight took

»

Aer Lingus
Regional

Emerald
Airlines

LEFT: ***Emerald has crew bases in both Dublin and Belfast***

over from Aer Lingus, which dropped the route in March 2024, consolidating its position at London/Heathrow.

"Until this summer, we had focused solely on the Aer Lingus Regional proposition. But recently, we have done some ad hoc charter flying and then the ACMI deal with British Airways. That was kind of our toe in the water," Lough explained. "It's come to an end now, and while there is currently nothing else on the radar, we'd be open to further exploring that type of business. But at the same time, we are mindful of where other airlines have failed in the past, and we don't want to be reckless in what we are doing."

Exploring work outside the Aer Lingus franchise poses an issue for Emerald when its fleet wears the Aer Lingus Regional colour scheme. Currently, the airline does not have its own livery, nor does it plan on introducing one. "We were quite fortunate with the BA flying that we were able to get permission from all parties involved," Lough said. "But we may have to look at introducing a white-tailed aircraft for any other future lines of flying."

Dublin passenger cap

Another reason for Emerald to be open to other opportunities is the ongoing issues regarding the passenger cap at Dublin Airport. The cap limits the number of passengers that can use the facility annually to 32 million, a condition of the 2007 planning permission for the new terminal. In the latest development, a High Court ruling in November paused the effects of the cap for summer 2025.

BELOW: ***The airline works closely with all of the airports it serves to build connectivity and increase passenger numbers***

Aer Lingus
ATR 72-600
Regional
EI-GPP

Emerald welcomed the news: "This is an important first step in removing the uncertainty caused by the cap," Lough explained. "The ruling provides a baseline for planning next summer, and we'll be assessing the full details and implications for our operations." However, the airline acknowledges that the ruling is a temporary measure. "The court action remains ongoing, and a permanent resolution is still needed," Lough continued. "It's essential for the government, and all relevant parties to promptly propose a long-term solution to address the cap effectively."

For now, the airline has been exploring the opportunities of flying from other Irish airports to the UK, adding a new four-times-weekly service from Cork to Glasgow from October 27. This joined the airline's existing nine-weekly service to Bristol from Cork. Lough said that the airline will continue to explore these routes but only if the demand is there.

ABOVE: ***Emerald Airlines' fleet currently stands at 18, with 11 on the Irish register and seven on the UK***

BELOW: ***The airline is now focused on running a safe, sustainable, and efficient ATR 72-600 operation for Aer Lingus Regional and exploring "other opportunities that may arise"***

Looking ahead

Lough explained that the airline had slowed down its growth to focus on its operational performance, which led Emerald to boast a 99% flight dispatch reliability for the year so far. This followed the airline being awarded the most punctual airline in the UK in 2023, in a list compiled by the PA news agency using Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) analysis of scheduled and chartered departures from UK airports by airlines operating more than 2,500 flights. "That was an important one for us," Lough enthused. "For some of the customer demographic we are going after, on those high-frequency routes, they don't want to be delayed in an airport every week."

The airline's reliability has been helped by its fleet of ATR 72-600s, which Lough said they were "incredibly pleased" with, describing it as "an ideal aircraft" for its operation. Indeed, when asked if Emerald had any plans to diversify or add jet equipment, Lough said: "Currently, we are laser-focused on the ATR. We plan to keep a single fleet type and extract the operational efficiencies that come from that."

Indeed, the ATR also assists the airline with its sustainability requirements. "Sustainability and safety are underpinned in the company and will remain front and centre in everything that we do," Lough said. "The great thing about the ATR is that it already ticks many of those boxes as one of the most environmentally friendly aircraft out there."

Looking ahead, Lough said that despite issues such as the passenger cap, the airline was well positioned for its next stage of growth. "The market between the UK and Ireland has always been strong, and there's always been a long history of high-frequency flights between the two, and we have confidence in those markets," he explained. "Our ultimate focus now is on running a safe, sustainable, and efficient ATR 72-600 operation for Aer Lingus Regional while keeping ourselves open to any other opportunities that may arise." **AW**

The author would like to thank Ian Lough for taking the time out of his busy schedule for the interview and Sarah McCarthy for her assistance with the article.

Airliner Deliveries

The latest commercial aircraft deliveries from manufacturers and lessors

Boeing 737 MAX 200, EI-IKI (c/n 62379), was the 27th of the type to be delivered to Irish budget carrier Ryanair during 2024 JOE G WALKER

Air Arabia [G9/ABY 'Arabia']			
A6-AQE	A320-214	5058	ex N854VA, dd 25.10.24, lsd fr Aviation Capital Group
Fly Vaayu [VYU 'Vaayu']			
A6-RMA	A320-232(F)	2288	ex D-AATA, dd 07.10.24, lsd fr ST Aerospace
Gulf Air [GF/GFA 'Gulf Air']			
A9C-XF	A321-251nx	12017	ex D-AYAQ, ff 30.08.24, dd 18.09.24
Air China [CA/CCA 'Air China']			
B-657A	ARJ21-700	10161	dd 25.10.24
Central Airlines [I9/HLF 'Homeland']			
B-226W	B777-F	66080	ex G-DHMB, dd 11.10.24, lsd fr/op for DHL
B-226Y	B777-F	66079	ex G-DHMA, dd 14.10.24, lsd fr/op for DHL
Chengdu Airlines [EU/UEA 'United Eagle']			
B-32HL	A320-251n	12137	ex B-007Q, ff 13.08.24, dd 26.09.24, parked Tianjin
China Eastern Airlines [MU/CES 'China Eastern']			
B-32HW	A320-251n	12250	ex F-WWIQ, ff 04.09.24, dd 25.09.24
China Southern Airlines [CZ/CSN 'China Southern']			
B-20AT	B737-8	63280	ex N1780B, N1787B, N1786B, ff 01.08.19, dd 06.09.24
B-20CU	B737-8	65274	ex N5573B, N1795B, N1786B, ff 30.09.19, dd 06.09.24
B-32HQ	A320-251n	12243	ex F-WWTP, ff 22.08.24, dd 25.09.24
B-657J	C919-100STD	20	ex B-002N, ff 09.10.24, dd 25.10.24
B-657K	ARJ21-700	10160	dd 21.10.24
JD Airlines [JG/JDL 'Jingdong']			
B-226R	B737-81B(BCF)	30697	ex N306AR, dd 29.10.24, lsd fr AerCap
Juneyao Airlines [HO/DKH 'Air Juneyao']			
B-32JE	A321-271nx	11941	ex B-007S, ff 28.08.24, dd 27.09.24
Shanghai Airlines [FM/CSH 'Shanghai Air']			
B-226F	B737-8	61659	ex N5573L, N40231, ff 24.09.21, dd 26.09.24
Shenzhen Airlines [ZH/CSZ 'Shenzhen Air']			
B-20EU	B737-8	61157	ex N230BE, N4022H, N4022T, ff 20.06.22, dd 24.09.24
B-225K	B737-8	61703	ex N243BE, N5573L, N4022T, ff 31.03.22, dd 23.09.24
Sichuan Airlines [3U/CSC 'Sichuan']			
B-32JH	A320-271n	12342	ex B-000E, ff 03.09.24, dd 25.09.24, lsd fr AerCap
Spring Airlines [9S/CQH 'Air Spring']			
B-32HK	A320-251n	11991	ex B-007J, ff 26.07.24, dd 03.09.24
Xiamen Airlines [MF/CXA 'Xiamen Air']			
B-32HS	A321-252nx	12341	ex B-000C, ff 23.09.24, dd 16.10.24
Air Hong Kong [LD/AHK 'Air Hong Kong']			
EI-LDC	A300F4-605R	857	ex B-LDC, dd 15.06.24, lsd fr/op for DHL
Cathay Pacific Airways [CX/CPA 'Cathay Pacific']			
B-HPR	A321-251nx	11993	ex D-AXXX, ff 09.08.24, dd 18.09.24 to Cathay Pacific Aircraft Services Ltd
HK Express [UO/HKE 'Hongkong Shuttle']			
B-KKI	A321-251nx	11992	ex F-WWSH, ff 01.08.24, dd 06.09.24 to Cathay Pacific Aircraft Services Ltd
Adventure Air			
C-GHYB	DHC-3T	386	ex 4656 Myanmar, reg'd 30.10.24 to 3097448 Manitoba Ltd
Air Tindi [8T/TID 'Tindi']			
C-FATA	DHC-7 103	106	ex C-GTGO, reg'd 24.10.24
Amik Aviation			
C-GEVO	Cessna 208B/EX	208B5115	ex N208CB, reg'd 10.10.24, (N208CB canx 10.09.24)
B.C. Yukon Air Service			
C-FAOP	DHC-2 Mk.I	1249	ex CF-AOP, reg'd 21.10.24
Central Mountain Air [9M/GLR 'Glacier']			
C-GHDQ	Beech 1900D	UE-276	ex N305DJ, reg'd 03.10.24
Excellent Adventures Outposts & Air Services			
C-FQQC	DHC-2 Mk.I	56	ex CF-QQC, reg'd 30.10.24
Kitchi Airways			
C-GATO	DHC-2 Mk.I	330	ex N5147G, reg'd 03.10.24
Porter Airlines [PD/POE 'Porter']			
C-GKXV	ERJ190-400	19020147	ex PR-EHL, reg'd 01.10.24
Sandy Lake Seaplane Service			
C-GZNB	Pa.31-350	31-7752079	ex N6654B, reg'd 10.10.24

SkyCare Air Ambulance			
C-FIOA	SA227-AC	AC-680	ex N680AX, reg'd 17.10.24 to 2080061 Ontario Inc
Sunwing Airlines [WG/SWG 'Sunwing']			
C-FFPH	B737-81D	39440	ret fr SmartWings lease
C-FJVE	B737-8DC	34596	as C-FFPH
C-FKVG	B737-8Q8	30719	ex OK-TVG, reg'd 22.10.24, lsd fr SmartWings
C-FPRP	B737-8FH	39959	as C-FFPH
C-GBZS	B737-8SH	42053	ret fr TUIfly Netherlands lease
C-GFEH	B737-8GS	41608	as C-FFPH
C-GLRN	B737-8SH	41353	as C-FFPH
C-GOWG	B737-86J	37757	as C-FFPH
WestJet [WS/WJA 'Westjet']			
C-FULJ	B737-8	42847	ex EI-GZN, reg'd 01.10.24, lsd fr SMBC Aviation Capital
C-GULN	B737-8	42845	ex EI-GZK, lsd fr SMBC Aviation Capital
C-GUUL	B737-8	42846	ex EI-GZM, lsd fr SMBC Aviation Capital
JetSMART [JA/JAT 'Rocksmart']			
CC-DID	A320-271n	11735	ret fr JetSMART Colombia & ret to service 16.09.24
LATAM Airlines Chile [LA/LAN 'Lan']			
EC-NBN	A330-243	818	ex OE-IBP, dd 28.10.24, lsd fr/op by Wamos Air
Air Arabia Maroc [3O/MAC 'Arabia Maroc']			
LZ-EAD	A320-232	2717	ex VP-CUI, dd 15.10.24, lsd fr/op by Electra Airways
TAP Air Portugal [TP/TAP 'Air Portugal']			
CS-TVN	A320-251n	12279	ex F-WWDE. ff 31.008.24, dd 20.09.24
Condor [DE/CFG 'Condor']			
D-ANMW	A321-271nx	12057	ex D-AXXO, ff 04.09.24, dd 17.09.24, lsd fr Aviation Capital Group, 'green' stripes
EAT Leipzig [QY/BCS 'Postman']			
D-ALOS	A330-243F	1708	ex F-HMRH, dd 10,24, seen Leipzig 06.10.24 in DHL Partner colours
Eurowings [EW/EWG 'Eurowings']			
9H-MLE	A320-214	4767	ex OE-IEE, dd 01.10.24, lsd fr/op by Avion Express Malta
German Airways [ZQ/GER 'German Eagle']			
D-AKJC	ERJ190-100SR	19000189	ret fr KLM Cityhopper lease
D-APRI	ERJ190-100SR	19000178	ret fr KLM Cityhopper lease
D-AWSI	ERJ190-100LR	19000074	ret fr KLM Cityhopper lease
Lufthansa [LH/DLH 'Lufthansa']			
EI-FPG	CRJ.900LR	15406	ex C-GZWO, dd 03.10.24, lsd fr/op by CityJet
TUIfly.com [X3/TUI 'Tui Jet']			
OM-GTF	B737-86J	28070	ex D-ASXK, dd 09.10.24, lsd fr/op by Go2Sky
TAAG Angola Airlines [DT/DTA 'Angola']			
D2-TAA	A220-300	55294	ex C-FTWU, ff 05.09.24, dd 19.09.24, lsd fr Air Lease Corp
Binter Canarias [NT/IBB 'Binter']			
EC-OJI	ERJ190-400	19020151	ex PR-EHN, dd 25.10.24, named 'Baleares'
EC-OJJ	ERJ190-400	19020152	ex PR-EHO, dd 29.10.24, named 'Vigo'
9H-VDF	A320-232	2156	ex OE-HIS, dd 05.10.24, lsd fr/op by Galistair Malta
Cygnus Air [RGN 'Cygnus Air']			
EC-OHH	A321-231(F)	3966	ex OE-IHW, dd 28.10.24, lsd fr Swiftair
Privilege Style [P6/PVG 'Privilege']			
EC-OCT	A321-231	5350	ret fr Wizz Air UK lease
Swiftair [WT/SWT 'Swift']			
EC-OHG	A321-231(F)	3964	ex OE-IHR, dd 31.10.24, lsd fr AerCap
Vueling [VY/VLG 'Vueling']			
EC-OGC	A320-232	2883	ex OE-KAL, reg'd 10.10.24, lsd fr AerCap, parked Tallinn
Wamos Air [EB/PLM 'Pullman']			
EC-NTX	A330-343E	1597	ret fr avianca lse
EC-ODR	A330-343X	1103	ret fr LEVEL lse
World2Fly [2W/WFL 'Blue World']			
EC-OHV	A330-343E	1562	ex OE-IRE, dd 25.10.24, lsd fr Babcock & Brown
Ryanair [FR/RYR 'Ryanair']			
EI-IKE	B737-8200	67115	ff 25.08.24, dd 09.09.24 & reg'd same day
EI-IKI	B737-8200	62379	ex N4022T, ff 24.08.24, dd 09.09.24 & reg'd same day
EI-IKM	B727-8200	62380	ex N4022L, N4022T, ff 17.08.24, dd 10.09.24 & reg'd same day

Key to Abbreviations

a/c	aircraft
als	airlines
awys	airways
bf	bought from
b/u	broken up/scrapped
canx	cancelled
cls	colours
cn	manufacturer's construction/serial number
cnvrtd	converted
dbf	destroyed by fire
dbr	damaged beyond repair
dd	delivery date
ex	previous reg'n
ff	first flight
frtr	freighter
lrf	last revenue flight
lsd fr	leased from
lsd to	leased to
msn	see cn
ntu	not taken up
oo	on order
op	operated
pax	passenger
pwfu	permanently withdrawn from use
reg'd	registered
reg'n	registration
ret fr	returned from
ret to	returned to
rr	re-registered
rts	return to service
sb	sold by
scr	scrapped/broken up
st	sold to
std	stored
tba	to be advised
unk	unknown
wfu	withdrawn from use
w/o	written off/destroyed

We welcome any feedback on this listing

(The listing is alphabetical with reference to the registration of the country of origin. Columns indicate the registration, type, construction number and notes.)

Taban Airlines [HH/TBN 'Taban']			
EP-TAU	DC-9 87	53337	ex YA-KMZ, dd 08.10.24
Yazd Airways [DZD 'Yazd Airways']			
EP-DZH	BAe Avro RJ85	E2383	ex TN-???, dd 08.10.24
FLYONE [5F/FIA 'Fia Airlines']			
9H-SAS	B737-8BK	33029	ex UR-SQP, dd 26.10.24, lsd fr/op by SkyUp Europe
Pecotox Air [PXA]			
ER-MDR	B747-409F	30764	ex N2240Q, dd 18.09.24, entered service 16.10.24
Marabu Airlines [DI/MBU 'Marabu']			
ES-MBE	A320-271n	8310	ex VT-IVO, dd 26.10.24, lsd fr Jackson Square Aviation
NyxAir [OJ/NYX 'Nyx Air']			
ES-NTA	ATR 42-500	655	ret fr Sky Alps lse
SmartLynx Estonia [MYX 'Tallinn Cat']			
ES-SAB	A320-214	3644	ret fr Ajet lease
ES-SAM	A320-232	1896	ret fr Ajet lease
ES-SAX	A320-214	3954	ret fr TUIfly Belgium lease
Xfly [EE/EST 'Revel']			
ES-ACB	CRJ.900ER	15261	ret fr SAS lease
ES-ACD	CRJ.900ER	15276	ret fr SAS lease
Asman Airlines [KGN 'Manas Bird']			
EX-21002	DHC-8 402	4459	ex N452QX, dd 01.11.24
Gewan Airways [GWN]			
EX-30002	A300B4-203(F)	141	ex UP-A3003, dd 17.10.24, lsd fr Air Speed Charter
Air France [AF/AFR 'Air France']			
F-HPNM	A220-300	55299	ex C-FOYB, ff 10.09.24, dd 18.10.24 & reg'd same day
F-HPNN	A220-300	55304	ex C-FOVH, ff 04.10.24, dd 24.10.24 & reg'd same day
Amelia International [8R/AIA 'Amelia']			
F-HDSJ	A319-112	3727	ret fr Air France lease
Transavia France [TO/TVF 'French Soleil']			
F-HXSF	A320-252n	12265	ex F-WWBF, ff 22.08.24, dd 10.09.24, lsd fr Avolon Aerospace & reg'd to Avolon Leasing Ireland 3 Ltd 11.09.24
Air Antilles [4I/KES]			
F-OMYR	DHC-6 400	969	ex C-FVIK, reg'd 23.09.24, lsd fr BPCE Lease Reunion
Air Tahiti [VT/VTA 'Air Tahiti']			
F-OZLI	ATR 72-212A (600)	1380	ex F-WWER, dd 10.24, lsd fr/op by Air Calédonie
AirTanker [9L/TOW 'Towline']			
G-VYGK	A330-243	1498	ret fr Jet2.com lease
British Airways (BA/BAW 'Speedbird']			
G-ZBLJ	B787-10	60636	ff 21.08.24, dd 04.09.24 & reg'd same day
Titan Airways [ZT/AWC 'Zap']			
G-OATW	A321-253nx	10238	ret fr TUI Airways lease
G-POWK	A320-233	4701	as G-OATW
G-POWM	A320-232	2564	as G-OATW
Sunrise Airways [S6/KSZ]			
ZS-OKT	Emb-120RT	120254	ex N261CA, lsd fr Sahara African Aviation
Aeronaves Dominicanas [DC/OLO 'Volodo']			
HI1112	EMB-135KL	145631	ex N834AE, reg'd 06.09.24
Aero-K [RF/EOK 'Aerohanguk']			
HL8595	A320-216	4346	ex M-ABSY, dd 08.10.24, lsd fr Babcock & Brown
Eastar Jet [ZE/ESR 'Eastar']			
HL8599	B737-8	43919	ex N57002, N57001,N56807, N1796B, N1786B, ff 06.06.19, dd 26.09.24 & reg'd same day
Jin Air [LJ/JNA 'Jin Air']			
HL7218	B737-8	63441	ex N4022T, dd 13.09.24, lsd fr Korean Air
Korean Air [KE/KAL 'Korean']			
HL7218	B737-8	63441	ex N4022T, ff 15.08.24, dd 13.09.24 & reg'd 14.09.24, lsd to Jin Air
DHL Aero Expreso [D5/DAE Yellow']			
HP-2210DAE	B757-2Q8(F)	29380	ex D-ALEN, dd 07.10.24, lsd fr/op for DHL
Thai Airways International [TG/THA 'Thai']			
HS-TEV	A330-343E	1315	ex G-VNYC, dd 11.10.24, lsd fr CDB Aviation, named 'Don Chedi'
HS-TEW	A330-343E	1329	ex G-VGBR, dd 24.10.24, lsd fr CDB Aviation, named 'Sai Buri'
flyadeal [F3/FAD 'Adeal']			
HZ-FBI	A320-251n	12255	ex F-WWIX, ff 05.09.24, dd 24.09.24 to Saudia, named 'Al-Ram'
Aeroitalia [XZ/AEZ 'Aeroitalia']			
9A-ZAG	A319-111	3443	ex EI-GYG, dd 05.10.24, lsd fr/op by Fly Air41 Airways
Air Dolomiti [EN/DLA 'Dolomiti']			
I-JENI	ERJ190-100LR	19000368	ex D-AECG, dd 06.10.24
ITA Airways [AZ/ITY 'Itarrow']			
EI-HXG	A321-271nx	11886	ex D-AVYQ, ff 19.07.24, dd 23.09.24, lsd fr Air Lease Corp & reg'd same day to ALC Clover Ireland Ltd, named 'Roberto Marson'
SkyAlps [BQ/SWQ 'Skyalps']			
9H-AKB	DHC-8 402	4226	ex OY-YDY, dd 10.23, parked Bratislava
9H-AKE	DHC-8 402	4223	ex OE-IMK, dd 10.23, parked Bratislava
Japan Airlines [JL/JAL 'Japanair']			
JA06WJ	A350-1041	676	ex F-WZFR, ff 02.09.24, dd 30.09.24
Eznis Airways [MG/EZA 'Eznis']			
EI-ULN	B737-73V	32426	ret fr Air Peace lease
Mongolian Airways [XF/MGW 'Great Mongolian']			
JU-1410	A320-214	4692	ret fr FLYONE Armenia lease
Widerøe's [WF/WIF 'Wideroe']			
ES-ACP	CRJ.900ER	15242	ex G-CKZO, dd 11.10.24, lsd fr/op by Xfly
JetSMART Argentina [WJ/JES Smartbird']			
CC-AWC	A320-232	7691	ex F-WHUM, dd 18.10.24, lsd fr CDB Aviation
CC-AWE	A320-232	8028	ex LV-KGO, dd 02.10.24, lsd fr China Aircraft Leasing Group
Avion Express [X9/NVD 'Nordvind']			
LY-FAA	A319-112	1745	ret fr airBaltic lse
LY-NVH	A321-231	2653	ex VP-CBX, dd 25.10.24, lsd fr Babcock & Brown, seen Prague 14.10.24 all white
GetJet Airlines [GJ/GJS 'Getjet']			
LY-FAS	A320-214	4273	ret fr Vueling lse
LY-GYM	A320-214	2584	ret fr Air Serbia lse
LY-NOW	A320-232	4328	ret fr Vueling lse

Continuing its transition to Airbus, Transavia France accepted A320neo, F-HXSF (c/n 12265), on September 11, 2024
JAVIER RODRIGUEZ

Airliner Deliveries

The latest commercial aircraft deliveries from manufacturers and lessors

Bulgarian airline Fly2Sky has taken delivery of another A320-232, LZ-FSG (c/n 5228), which wears larger titles than seen before on the carrier's fleet
JAVIER RODRIGUEZ

LY-WIL	A320-214	3138	ret fr Vueling lse
LY-WSA	A321-211	2115	ret fr Vueling lse

Heston Airlines [HN/HST 'Heston']

LY-NRU	A320-214	3596	ret fr Condor lse

KlasJet [KLS 'Class Line']

LY-LOC	B737-85P	33980	ret fr SmartWings lease

BH Air [8H/BGH 'Balkan Holidays']

LZ-BHL	A320-232	2987	ret fr Corendon Airlines lease

Bul Air [LB/BVL 'Bulgary']

LZ-FBE	A320-214	3780	ret fr Marabu Airlines lease

Bulgaria Air [FB/LZB 'Flying Bulgaria']

LZ-LIS	A220-100	50077	ex C-FPDR, ff 16.08.24, dd 05.09.24, lsd fr Air Lease Corp

Electra Airways [3E/EAF 'Electra']

LZ-EAE	A320-214	1009	ret fr AMC Aviation lease
LZ-EAG	A321-111	1144	ret fr AMC Aviation lease
LZ-EAI	A320-232	1862	ret fr Royal Air Maroc lease

Fly2Sky [F6/VAW 'Sofia Jet']

LZ-FSA	A320-232	4247	ret fr Air Algérie lease
LZ-FSB	A320-214	3055	ret fr Air Serbia lease
LZ-FSG	A320-232	5228	ex 9V-TRQ, dd 06.10.24, lsd fr Maverick Aviation
LZ-FSH	A321-211	1932	ret fr Arkia lease
LZ-FSI	A321-211	1960	ret fr Israir lease

Electra Airways [3E/EAF 'Electra']

LZ-EAH	A320-214	2930	ret fr Air Arabia Maroc lease

Alaska Airlines [AS/ASA 'Alaska']

N723AL	B737-9	67428	ex N4022T, ff 31.08.24, dd 25.09.24 & reg'd same day

Allegiant Air [G4/AAY 'Allegiant']

N811NV	B737-8200	68002	ex N4022T, ff 10.06.24, dd 09.09.24 & reg'd 23.09.24 to Sunrise Asset Management LLC

Alpine Air Express [5A/AIP 'Alpine Air']

N253SF	Beech 1900C-1	UC-53	ex N31764, reg'd 21.10.24
N719GL	Beech 1900C	UB-19	ex N314BH, reg'd 26.10.24

American Airlines [AA/AAL 'American']

N355TW	B737-8	44496	ex N4022T, ff 15.07.24, dd 05.09.24 & reg'd 11.09.24, fleet # '3TW'

Ameriflight [A8/AMF 'Amflight']

N192WA	Beech B99	U-152	ex C-GEOI
N197WA	Beech 99A	U-130	ex C-FOZU

Atlas Air [GY/GTI 'Giant']

N864GT	B747-83QF	60117	ex VQ-BFU, dd 01.10.24, lsd fr Altavair AirFinance & reg'd 02.10.24 to UMB Bank NA Trustee

Avelo Air [XP/VXP 'Avelo']

N812VL	B737-8EH	35836	ex PR-GUD, dd 01.10.24, lsd fr Carlyle Aviation Partners

Breeze Airways [MX/MXY 'Moxy']

N238BZ	A220-300	55287	ex C-GPMU, ff 02.08.24, dd 03.09.24 & reg'd same day to Bank of Utah Trustee

Delta Air Lines [DL/DAL 'Delta']

N430DX	A330-941	2069	ex F-WWKQ, ff 12.08.24, dd 03.09.24 & reg'd same day, fleet # '3430'
N524DN	A350-941	680	ex F-WZNP, ff 12.08.24, dd 05.09.24 & reg'd same day, fleet # '3524'
N584DN	A321-271nx	12042	ex D-AVZN, ff 02.09.24, dd 16.09.24 & reg'd same day, fleet # '5084'
N585DN	A321-271nx	12105	ex F-WZMB, ff 09.08.24, dd 10.09.24 & reg'd sama day, fleet # '5085'

FedEx Feeder

N771FX	Cessna 408	408-0032	reg'd 30.09.24
N772FX	Cessna 408	408-0033	reg'd 02.10.24
N773FX	Cessna 408	408-0035	ff 09.08.24, dd 03.10.24, reg'd 15.10.24, to be op by Mountain Air Cargo

Frontier Airlines [F9/FFT 'Frontier']

N654FR	A321-271nx	12174	ex FWZMA, ff 21.08.24, dd 06.09.24 & reg'd same day to Bank of Utah Trustee, named 'Carmen the Black Bear'

GlobalX [G6/GXA 'Gemini']

N276GX	A320-214	2695	ret fr TUIfly Netherlands lease

Hawaiian Airlines [HA/HAL 'Hawaiian']

N4663K	A330-343(F)	1865	ex F-WXAC, dd 04.10.24, lsd fr Altavair AirFinance, op for Prime Air
N5843K	A330-343(F)	1071	ex F-WTAN, dd 28.10.24, lsd fr Altavair AirFinance, op for Prime Air

IBC Airways [II/CSQ 'Chasqui']

N11155	Emb-145XR	145782	ex PT-SMJ, dd 03.10.24

jetBlue Airways [B6/JBU 'Jetblue']

N3232J	A220-300	55301	ex C-FPAG, ff 16.09.24, dd 26.09.24 & reg'd 27.09.24, named 'Love, Love Me Blue'

SkyWest Airlines [OO/SKW 'Skywesr']

N570GJ	CRJ.550	10111	ex N513MJ, reg'd 17.10.24
N571GJ	CRJ.550	10116	ex N514MJ

Southwest Airlines [WN/SWA 'Southwest']

N8931L	B737-8	42593	ex N4022T, ff 01.09.24, dd 11.09.24 & reg'd same day
N8932Q	B737-8	42601	ex N4022T, ff 20.08.24, dd 03.09.24 & reg'd same day
N8933Q	B737-8	42605	ex N4022T, ff 30.08.24, dd 30.09.24 & reg'd same day

Spirit Airlines [NK/NKS 'Spirit Wing']

N726NK	A321-271nx	11928	ex D-AZAA, ff 06.09.24, dd 30.09.24, lsd fr AerCap & reg'd same day to Wilmington Trust Co Trustee, fleet #'6726'
N730NK	A321-271nx	12035	ex D-AVZR, ff 09.09.24, dd 17.09.24, lsd fr Air Lease Corp & reg'd same day ALC A321 72024A LLC, fleet # '6730'
N732NK	A321-271nx	12178	ex F-WZME, ff 29.08.24, dd 12.09.24, lsd fr Air Lease Corp & reg'd 13.09.24 to ALC A321 52024 LLC, fleet # '6732'
N737NK	A321-271nx	12207	ex F-WZMH, ff 12.09.24, dd 26.09.24, lsd fr Air Lease Corp & reg'd same day to ALC A321 720244 LLC, fleet # '6737'

United Airlines [UA/UAL 'United']

N17341	B737-8	67605	ex N4022T, ff 11.05.24, dd 03.09.24 & reg'd same day, fleet # '7341'
N17356	B737-8	67625	ex N4022T, ff 12.06.24, dd 24.09.24 & reg'd 24.09.24, fleet # '7356'
N47298	B737-8	67611	ex N4206T, N4022T, ff 22.05.24, dd 09.09.24 & reg'd same day, fleet # '7298'
N47343	B737-8	67607	ex N4022T, ff 19.04.22, dd 11.09.24 & reg'd 13.09.24 to UMB Bank NA Trustee, fleet # '7343'
N77582	B737-9	43521	ex N4022T, ff 12.08.24, dd 10.09.24, st Aviation Capital Group & lsd back, reg'd to 10.09.24 to UMB Bank NA Trustee

UPS Airlines [5X/UPS 'Ups']

N387UP	B767-300F	67976	ff 17.08.24, dd 11.09.24 & reg'd 24.09.24 to C C & E I LLC

Austrian Airlines [OS/AUA 'Austrian']

SE-MKE	ATR 72-212A (600)	1348	ex F-WWEH, dd 27.10.24, lsd fr/op by Braathens Regional Airlines
SE-MKF	ATR 72-212A (600)	1357	ex F-WWER, dd 17.10.24, lsd fr/op by Braathens Regional Airlines
SE-MKG	ATR 72-212A (600)	1354	ex F-WWEN, dd 25.10.24, lsd fr/op by Braathens Regional Airlines

SmartWings [QS/TVS 'Sky Travel']

OK-TSF	B737-8GJ	37360	ret fr Eurowings lease
OK-TSO	B737-8GQ	35793	as OK-TSF
OK-TVT	B737-86N	39394	as OK-TSF
OK-TVV	B737-86N	38027	as OK-TSF

Air Explore [ED/AXE 'Galileo']

OM-FEX	B737-8Q8	28213	ret fr Enter Air lease
OM-HEX	B737-81Q	30785	as OM-FEX
OM-NEX	B737-8KN	29636	ret fr TUI Airways lease
OM-OEX	B737-82R	38173	ret fr Enter Air lease

Go2Sky [6G/RLX 'Relax']

OM-GTK	B737-86N	36809	ret fr SmartWings lease

Air Belgium [KF/ABB 'Air Belgium']

OO-ABF	A330-941	1844	ret fr LOT Polish Airlines lease, parked Lourdes

TUIfly Belgium [TB/JAF 'Beauty']

OM-GTJ	B737-8K5	30413	ex EI-GYO, dd 02.10.24, lsd fr/op by Go2Sky
9H-ARI	B737-8	42826	ex OE-IVY, dd 30.09.24, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx Malta
9H-ETA	B737-8	60458	ex 2-POWR, dd 29.09.24, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx Malta
9H-LYR	B737-8	43302	ex VQ-BGW, dd 30.09.24, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx Malta

DAT [DX/DTR 'Danish']

OY-RUU	A321-231	878	ret fr BA Euroflyer lease
OY-RUY	A320-232	6733	as OY-RUU

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines [KL/KLM 'Klm']

PH-AXB	A321-252nx	12144	ex D-AZAJ, ff 18.09.24, dd 27.09.24 & reg'd same day, lsd fr CDB Leasing, named 'Braamvlinder / Peach Blossom'

Transavia [HV/TRA 'Transavia']

9A-KOR	B737-8GJ	34899	ex 2-BBRV, dd 30.09.24, lsd fr/op by ETF Airways

BBN Airlines Indonesia [7B/BBL 'Iron Bird']

PK-BBJ	B737-4Q8(F)	26302	ex VP-CBA, dd 10.24, lsd fr Asia Pacific Leasing Co

Azul Linhas Aéreas [AD/AZU 'Azul']

PR-AIL	A330-243	991	ex N775CL, dd 11.10.24, lsd fr Avolon Aerospace & reg'd to UMB Bank NA, named 'Encanto Azul'
PS-AJA	A321-231(F)	2741	ex OE-IAW, dd 18.10.24, lsd fr AerCap, in 'Cargo Blue' colours

Sideral Linhas Aéreas [SID 'Sideral']

PR-SJA	B737-79P	30651	ex N796BC, dd 24.10.24

Air Niugini [PX/ANG 'Niugini']

P2-PXT	DHC-8 402	4327	ex C-FFOY, dd 22.10.24

Key to Abbreviations

a/c	aircraft
als	airlines
awys	airways
bf	bought from
b/u	broken up/scrapped
canx	cancelled
cls	colours
cn	manufacturer's construction/serial number
cnvrtd	converted
dbf	destroyed by fire
dbr	damaged beyond repair
dd	delivery date
ex	previous reg'n
ff	first flight
frtr	freighter
lrf	last revenue flight
lsd fr	leased from
lsd to	leased to
msn	see cn
ntu	not taken up
oo	on order
op	operated
pax	passenger
pwfu	permanently withdrawn from use
reg'd	registered
reg'n	registration
ret fr	returned from
ret to	returned to
rr	re-registered
rts	return to service
sb	sold by
scr	scrapped/broken up
st	sold to
std	stored
tba	to be advised
unk	unknown
wfu	withdrawn from use
w/o	written off/destroyed

We welcome any feedback on this listing

(The listing is alphabetical with reference to the registration of the country of origin. Columns indicate the registration, type, construction number and notes.)

Lukoil-Avia [LUK]			
RA-89215	RRJ100-95B	95230	ex 97022, ff 18.11.22, dd 11.10.24, last RRJ100 with western-built engines
LaneXang [LXW]			
RDPL-34163	ATR 72-212A (500)	906	ex XU-236, dd 31.10.24
Cebu Pacific Air [5J/CEB 'Cebu Air']			
RP-C4146	A321-271nx	12067	ex D-AYAB, ff 06.09.24, dd 24.09.24
RP-C4262	A320-214	5515	ex N361VA, dd 23.10.24
BRA – Braathens Regional Airlines [TF/BRX 'Braathens']			
SE-MKA	ATR 72-212A (600)	1276	ret fr Austrian Airlines lease
SE-MKI	ATR 72-212A (600)	1379	ret fr Austrian Airlines lease
TUIfly Nordic [6B/BLX 'Bluescan']			
SE-RFZ	B787-9	44579	ret fr TUI Airways lease
Enter Air [E4/ENT 'Enter']			
EI-FFA	B737-8K5	38097	ex G-TUKM, dd 11.10.24, lsd fr/op by Fly4 Airlines
LOT Polish Airlines [LO/LOT 'Pollot']			
SP-LEC	ERJ190-400	19020135	ex PR-ECQ, dd 10.10.24, lsd fr Azorra Aviation
SP-LVQ	B737-8	43975	ex M-ABSR, dd 21.10.24, lsd fr Anka Aviation Capital
SP-LVT	B737-8	43974	ex M-ABSP, dd 11.10.24, lsd fr Anka Aviation Capital
Sky Taxi [TE/IGA 'Iguana']			
SP-MRH	B767-375ER(F)	25121	ex N203CM, dd 10.24, lsd fr Cargo Aircraft Management
SprintAir [P8/SRN 'Sprintair']			
SP-KPG	Saab 340A	340A-151	ret fr Trade Air lease
Lumiwings [L9/LWI 'Lumi']			
SX-LWC	B737-7K2	30659	ret fr Alp Avia lease
Ajet [VF/TKJ 'Anatolia']			
TC-JTS	A320-232	7771	ex 2-VNJB, dd 14.10.24, lsd fr Wings Capital Partners, entered service 25.10.24
TC-JTT	A320-232	7378	ex 2-VNJA, dd 24.10.24, lsd fr Wings Capital Partners
TC-JTU	A320-232	7796	ex 2-VNJC, dd 09.10.24, lsd fr Wings Capital Partners
TC-LBF	A320-271n	8101	ex VT-IVG, dd 08.10.24, lsd fr Fuyo General Lease
YL-LDN	A320-232	3641	ex OE-IFQ, dd 18.09.24, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx
Pegasus Airlines [PC/PGT 'Sunturk']			
TC-RFG	A321-251nx	12140	ex D-AYAT, ff 17.07.24, dd 27.07.24, named 'Tuana'
TC-RFH	A321-251nx	12106	ex D-AYAR, ff 03.09.24, dd 26.09.24, named 'Nehir Dora'
Turkish Airlines [TK/THY 'Turkish']			
TC-LHA	A350-941	688	ex F-WZGT, ff 04.09.24, dd 27.09.24
TC-LPJ	A321-271nx	11976	ex D-AYAE, ff 28.09.24, dd 17.09.24
Camair-Co [QC/CRC 'Camairco']			
SX-MTO	ERJ170-200LR	17000347	ex EI-RDN, dd 20.10.24, lsd fr/op by Marathon Airline
Nouvelair Tunisie [BJ/LBT 'Nouvelair']			
TS-INL	A320-251n	12280	ex F-WWBT, ff 22.08.24, dd 19.09.24, lsd fr BOC Aviation
Centrum Air [C6/MFX 'Whitebird']			
UK32130	A320-251n	7807	ret fr FLYONE lease
Qanot Sharq Airlines [HH/QNT 'Qanot Sharq']			
TC-GRB	A330-223	1266	ex VP-BUT, dd 02.10.24, lsd fr/op by Southwind Airlines
Air Astana [KC/KZR 'Astanaline']			
EI-KDI	A321-231	5287	ex HL8265, dd 04.10.24, lsd fr Avolon Aerospace
SkyUp Airlines [PQ/SQP 'Skyup']			
UR-SQE	B737-75C	30034	ret fr Arkia lse & lsd to SkyUp Europe
Windrose Airlines [7W/WRC 'Wind Rose']			
UR-EMA	ERJ190-100STD	19000494	ret fr Air Mont-engro lease
UR-PSF	B737-84R	38120	ret fr FLYONE lease
UR-PSI	B737-9KVER	41534	ret fr FLYONE lease
Alliance Airlines [QQ/UTY 'Unity']			
ERJ190-100AR	19000020	ex N197JB, dd 13.11.24	
Fly Australia Charter			
VH-TGX	Cessna 208B	208B2268	ex N910HL, reg'd 15.10.24, lsd fr Phil Van Wegen Holdings Pty Ltd
Jetstar Airways [JQ/JST 'Jetstar']			
VH-OYT	A321-251nx	11977	ex D-AXXP, ff 09.09.24, dd 23.09.24 to Qantas Airways
National Jet Systems (QantasLink) [NC/NJS 'National Jet']			
XH-X4D	A220-300	55298	ex C-FOWQ, ff 28.08.24, dd 11.09.24 to Qantas Airways, named 'Platypus'
Network Aviation (QantasLink) [NWK 'Netlink']			
VH-8NZ	A319-132	3395	ex N534NK, reg'd 01.10.24 to Qantas Airways, named 'Abrolhos Islands'
Pay's Aviation			
VH-8TL	Cessna 208B	208B1180	ex N208TD, reg'd 03.10.24, lsd fr Aerofacilites
Skytraders [SND 'Snowbird']			
VH-8FE	A320-214	5129	ex F-HBNL, reg'd 29.10.24, lsd fr MAM Aircraft Leasing
Vietjet Air [VJ/VJC 'Vietjet Air']			
VN-A539	A321-271nx	12188	ex D-AXXR, ff 13.09.24, dd 30.09.24
Air India Express [IX/AXB 'Express India']			
VT-BWG	B737-8	61142	ex N6055X, N1786B, ff 11.01.19, dd 13.09.24
VT-BWH	B737-8	43837	ex N5515R, N1784B, N1787B, N1786B, ff 26.10.19, dd 11.09.24
VT-EXD	A320-214	6724	ex F-WWIF, dd 09.10.24, lsd fr China Aircraft Leasing Group
VT-EXE	A320-214	6803	ex F-WWBR, dd 09.10.24, lsd fr China Aircraft Leasing Group
Akasa Air [QP/AKJ 'Akasa Air']			
VT-YBB	B737-8200	63871	ff 12.06.24, dd 06.09.24
IndiGo [6E/IGO 'Ifly']			
VT-ICB	A321-251nx	11984	ex D-AXXT, ff 26.08.24, dd 5.09.24
VT-ICC	A321-251nx	12107	ex D-AYAD, ff 13.09.24, dd 23.09.24
VT-ICD	A321-251nx	12118	ex D-AYAO, ff 19.09.24, dd 30.09.24
VT-IKQ	A320-214	4013	ex VP-CBK, dd 27.09.24, lsd fr Avolon Aerospace, entered service 05.10.24
VT-IRX	A321-251nx	12025	ex D-AYAG, ff 27.08.24, dd 12.09.24
VT-IRY	A321-251nx	12046	ex D-AXXS, ff 18.09.24, dd 26.09.24
VT-IWM	A321-251nx	12152	ex D-AVZT, ff 30.08.24, dd 18.09.24
VT-IXJ	A320-251n	12278	ex F-WWBI, ff 13.09.24, dd 24.09.24
VT-IXK	A320-251n	12268	ex F-WWID, ff 06.009.24, dd 19.09.24
VT-IXL	A320-251n	12293	ex F-WWDG, ff 10.09.24, dd 30.09.24
SpiceJet [SG/SEJ 'Spicejet']			
9H-CXA	B737-85R	42804	ex OE-IGF, 07.10.24, lsd fr/op by Corendon Airlines Europe
9H-TJC	B737-86N	38012	ex OE-IIF, 07.10.24, lsd fr/op by Corendon Airlines Europe
Aeroméxico [AM/AMX 'Aeromexico']			
N173AM	B737-8	66297	ex N4022T, ff 05.08.24, dd 13.09.24 & reg'd same day to Bank of Utah Trustee
XA-GQS	B737-9	62935	ex N4022H, N4022T, ff 28.07.24, dd 04.09.24
Viva Aerobus [VB/VIV 'Viva']			
XA-VDG	A320-232	3143	ex LZ-DCU, dd 10.24, lsd fr DAE Capital, entered service 28.10.24
XA-VXS	A321-271nx	11924	ex D-AYAU, ff 19.09.24, dd 27.09.24
9H-GKK	A320-232	6865	ex VT-TTJ, dd 24.09.24, lsd fr Avion Express Malta, entered service 28.09.24
Air Serbia [JU/ASL 'Air Serbia']			
LZ-BUR	ERJ190-100AR	19000551	ex PT-TBV, dd 04.24, lsd fr/op by Bulgaria Air
LZ-SOF	ERJ190-100AR	19000492	ex PT-TPQ, dd 14.10.24, lsd fr/op by Bulgaria Air
YU-ARD	A330-243	1486	ex OE-LAC, dd 07.10.24, lsd fr Altavair AirFinance
Milford Sound Flights			
ZK-MCS	Cessna 208B	208B1050	ex VH-EIY, reg'd 30.10.24
FlySafair [FA/SFR]			
ZS-ZWG	B737-8LD	40972	ex N202TS, dd 16.10.24, lsd fr AELF
Global Aviation [GE/GBB 'Globe']			
ZS-GAC	A320-232	2496	ret fr SmartWings lease
South African Airways [SA/SAA 'Springbok']			
TC-SOC	B737-800	61333	dd 27.10.24, lsd fr/op by SunExpress
airHaifa [HFA 'Air Haifa']			
4X-IHB	ATR 72-212A (600)	1132	ex M-ABRH, dd 03.10.24, lsd fr ACIA Aero Leasing
Arkia – Israeli Airlines [IZ/AIZ 'Arkia']			
UR-SQF	B737-8H6	40151	ex N833BC, dd 16.10.24, lsd fr/op by SkyUp Airlines
Israir [6H/ISR 'Israir']			
LZ-FSF	A320-214	3605	ex N279GX, dd 05.10.24, lsd fr/op by Fly2Sky
Fly Oya [YI]			
5A-GRS	B777-246ER	32889	ex N839KW, dd 29.10.24
Libyan Express [LB/LXX]			
5A-ATR	ATR 42-500	673	ex 4K-AZ808, dd 17.10.24
Tus Airways [U8/CYF 'Tus Air']			
YR-JUL	A320-232	3863	ex VT-INY, dd 15.10.24, lsd fr/op by Dan Air
Allied Air [AJK 'Bambi']			
5N-	B737-8U3(F)	30146	ex N314BR, dd 16.10.24 & reg'd to Aerospace Trust Management LLC Trustee 23.10.24, parked Goodyear
Ibom Air [QI/IAN 'Ibom']			
5N-CED	CRJ.900LR	15281	ex B-7693, dd 27.10.24, lsd fr Formidion Aviation
5N-CEE	CRJ.900LR	15280	ex B-7692, dd 26.10.24, lsd fr Formidion Aviation
United Nigeria Airlines [U5/NUA 'United Nigeria']			
SX-PTM	ERJ190-100SR	19000163	ex G-LCYM, dd 31.10.24, lsd fr/op by Marathon Airlines for 1 year
Asky Airlines [KP/SKK 'Asky']			
ET-BAT	B737-8	61808	ex C-FLRS, dd 01.10.24, lsd fr Ethiopian Airlines
Kenya Airways [KQ/KQA 'Kenya']			
9H-HFI	A330-302	805	ex LY-BLU, dd 17.10.24, lsd fr/op by Hi Fly Malta
Maandeeq Air			
5Y-IFB	Fokker 70	11528	ex 2-HJCH, dd 28.09.24, lsd fr/op by I-Fly
Zebu Air			
7Q-TOA	Let 410UVP-E20	902517	ex OK-MEL, dd 22.10.24
Trade Air [C3/TDR 'Trade Air']			
YL-RAL	Saab 340A(QC)	340A-100	ex SP-MRB, dd 13.10.24, lsd fr/op by RAF-Avia
9A-BTI	A320-214	2189	ret fr Air Montengro lease
Air Atlanta Europe [CT/AAE 'Euroviking']			
9H-AZA	B747-428	32871	ret fr Saudia lease
9H-FLM	B747-409F	33731	ex B-18715, dd 10.24, parked Victorville
Airhub Airlines [RE/GJM 'Airhub']			
9H-GTS	A320-232	4384	ret fr TAP Air Portugal lease
Avion Express Malta [4X/MLH 'South Wind']			
9H-MLD	A320-214	3601	ret fr Eurowings lease
9H-MLL	A320-214	5372	ret fr Eurowings lease
9H-MLO	A320-214	5653	ret fr Eurowings lease
9H-MLP	A320-232	4109	ret fr Eurowings lease
Challenge Airlines MT [X6/CHZ 'Cargo Rock']			
9H-CAD	B767-318ER(F)	30301	ex VP-BMC, dd 18.09.24, lsd fr AerCap
Hi Fly Malta [3L/HFM 'Moonraker']			
9H-HFH	A330-202	950	ret fr Air Algérie lease
9H-HFJ	A330-223	939	ret fr Air Algérie lease
9H-HFK	A330-223	874	ret fr Air Algérie lease
9H-HFL	A330-223	1002	ret fr Air Algérie lease
9H-MFS	A330-202	700	ex TC-AGL, dd 27.09.24, parked Beja
Malta Med Air [MT/MMO 'Malit']			
9H-MMO	A320-232	3577	ret fr Royal Air Maroc lease
SkyUp Europe [U5/SEU 'Sky Malta']			
UR-SQE	B737-75C	30034	ex N723AC, dd 01.11.24, lsd fr SkyUp Airlines
UR-SQO	B737-82R	40880	ex OE-ISL, dd 15.10.24, lsd fr SkyUp Airlines
9H-SAT	B737-8Q8	29368	ret fr Wizz Air lease
9H-SAU	B737-8KN	40249	ret fr Wizz Air Malta lease
SmartLynx Malta [2N/LYX 'Malta Cat']			
9H-SLJ	A320-214	3880	ret fr TUIfly Belgium lease
Wizz Air Malta [W4/WMT 'Wizz Malta']			
9H-WNQ	A321-271nx	12014	ex D-AVZI, ff 03.09.24 dd 19.09.24 to Wizz Air
MJets Air [WW/KXP 'Express Kargo']			
9M-WWB	B737-86N(BCF)	32685	ex VP-CMG, dd 08.10.24, lsd fr AerCap
Jetstar Asia [3K/JSA 'Jetstar Asia']			
9V-JSV	A320-232	5813	ex VH-XNW, dd 24.10.24
Scoot [TR/TGW 'Scooter']			
9V-THD	ERJ190-300	19020154	ex PR-EGQ, ff 24.09.24, dd 20.10.24, lsd fr Azorra Aviation, named 'Travel Kaki'
Singapore Airlines [SQ/SIA 'Singapore']			
9V-SCQ	B787-10	60270	ff 11.01.21, dd 25.09.24
9V-SCZ	B787-10	64805	ff 02.08.24, dd 11.09.24
9V-SDA	B787-10	67157	ff 28.08.24, dd 24.09.24

The latest news from maintenance, repair and overhaul providers

By Nigel Pittaway

Pegasus picks Lufthansa Technik

Turkish low-cost carrier Pegasus Airlines has selected Lufthansa Technik (LHT) to provide base maintenance services for its Airbus A320 Family of airliners.

Under the terms of the three-year agreement, the MRO will provide more than 60 maintenance checks on the carrier's A320ceo, A320neo and A321neo aircraft at Lufthansa Technik Sofia.

Pegasus, the country's second-largest airline, has already contracted LHT for services including landing gear overhauls and shorter base maintenance opportunities, as well as its AVIATAR digital product for technical operations.

Serife Akin, senior purchasing director of Pegasus Airlines, commented: "The newly concluded contract and thus the long-term intensification of our co-operation with [LHT] gives us flexibility and at the same time guarantees our high-quality standards. With our dedicated overhaul line at Lufthansa Technik Sofia, we are now optimally positioned for the coming years."

Elsewhere, Lufthansa Technik Shenzhen jointly announced a multi-year agreement covering airframe-related component services with Cebu Pacific on September 25, 2024.

flypgs.com
PEGASUS
Lufthansa Technik Sofia

The new agreement extends the existing partnership between the Philippine carrier and Lufthansa Technik and will see the MRO's Shenzhen business providing airframe component services for Cebu Pacific's A320 and A321ceo fleets from October. The contract specifically covers MRO and spare unit support for engine nacelle components, including inlet and fan cowlings, thrust reverser assemblies and exhaust nozzles, provided at Lufthansa Technik Shenzen's facility at Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport.

Shevantha Weerasekera, Cebu Pacific's vice president of engineering and fleet management, explained: "The contract signed today is a strong testament to Cebu Pacific's long-standing collaboration with Lufthansa Technik, and it reflects our complete confidence in their expertise. Cebu Pacific is committed to providing our passengers with safe, accessible and affordable air travel, and our continuous partnership with Lufthansa Technik allows us to fulfil this objective." (Photo Lufthansa Technik)

LEAP engine support for Corendon

StandardAero and Turkish Boeing 737 MAX 8 operator Corendon Airlines announced that the MRO will provide support for the carrier's CFM International LEAP-1B engines.

The work will be undertaken at StandardAero's dedicated MRO line for LEAP-1A and LEAP-1B powerplants in San Antonio, Texas.

The MRO has already inducted Corendon's first LEAP engine into its facility for a Continued Time Engine Maintenance (CTEM) visit and this new agreement extends the support arrangements StandardAero already holds for the carrier's CFM56-7B engines fitted to its Boeing 737-800 fleet.

Commenting on the announcement, Will Pitcher, senior vice president of sales, marketing and customers for StandardAero's Airlines & Fleets division, said: "[We are] proud to have been entrusted by Corendon Airlines to provide LEAP-1B MRO services, adding Turkey to our growing list of LEAP-1A and LEAP-1B customer nations. We value the confidence shown by Corendon in our San Antonio-based LEAP team and look forward to meeting the service expectations of the airline and its passengers for many years to come."

Embraer expands Texas facility

Brazilian airframer Embraer is to expand its E-Jet MRO facility at Perot Field Fort Worth Alliance Airport.

In partnership with the City of Fort Worth, Denton County and the State of Texas, Embraer indicated that it will commence operations in an existing hangar in the first quarter of 2025, while beginning construction of a second hangar that is scheduled for completion in 2027.

Carlos Naufel, president and CEO of Embraer Services & Support, said: "This expansion will significantly increase the capacity, capability, and footprint of our services network by providing world-class support to our customers and the growing fleet of E-Jets in North America. Also, it is part of Embraer's growth strategy in the US."

The new facility in Fort Worth adds to Embraer's global support network, which includes 12 company-owned service centres and 80 authorised service facilities around the world.

Elsewhere, Embraer further announced that SIA Engineering (Philippines) Corporation (SIAEP) – a subsidiary of SIA Engineering Company (SIAEC) – has become the first Embraer Authorised Service Centre in the Asia-Pacific region capable of performing MRO services for the Brazilian manufacturer's E2 family. SIAEP, based at Clark in the Philippines, has been an Embraer Authorised Service Centre for first generation E-Jets since 2017. (Photo Embraer)

The latest news from maintenance, repair and overhaul providers

By Nigel Pittaway

All action in Asia

Air France Industries KLM Engineering & Maintenance (AFI KLM E&M) has strengthened its customer base in the Asia-Pacific region with the signing of an agreement with Cambodia Airways.

The MRO provides extensive component support for the airline's Airbus A319 and A320 fleets, including the provision of a spares pool, repairs, logistics and main base kit positioning. The firm said that the agreement is designed to ensure Cambodia Airways benefits from uninterrupted operational support.

The agreement also concerns on-wing support for the carrier's CFM56-5B engines fitted to its A319 and A320s.

Edison Duan, CEO of Cambodia Airways, commented: "This five-year agreement will significantly enhance the operational reliability and efficiency of our A319 and A320 fleets. By leveraging AFI KLM E&M's expertise in component support, we are confident that we will continue to offer our passengers the highest levels of safety and service, while reinforcing our commitment to growth and excellence in the aviation industry.

The MRO further announced what it terms "significant advancements" in its relationship with Philippine Airlines, including the first on-wing fan module swap on a CFM56-5B engine that was undertaken in the PAL Express Hangar. (Photo PAL)

Egyptair selects Liebherr-Aerospace

Liebherr-Aerospace and Egyptair signed a three-year agreement in Cairo in September 2024, covering the joint maintenance of heat transfer equipment fitted to the carrier's Airbus A320ceo/neo fleet, as well as those of other airlines currently supported by Egyptair Engineering & Maintenance.

The re-coring and other major repairs of the heat exchangers will be undertaken at Liebherr-Aerospace Saline in Michigan.

Ibrahim Fathy, Egyptair Engineering & Maintenance chairman and CEO commented: "We are very happy to work with Liebherr-Aerospace to support our fleet of A320ceo/neo and the fleets of our customers that we already take care of under already existing maintenance contracts. Liebherr provides a high level of performance and flexibility. They understand and meet our and our customers' requirements."

In other news, Liebherr-Aerospace announced in September that it has signed a collaborative agreement with Asia Digital Engineering (ADE) to enhance predictive maintenance capabilities for A320ceo/neo aircraft on the latter's ELEVADE digital fleet management platform.

Under the agreement, ADE will benefit from Liebherr-Aerospace's suite of predictive maintenance algorithms and further trend monitoring applications, which Liebherr said will add value to the maintenance of its products, including bleed air management and flight control components fitted to A320/A321 aircraft.

Alex Vlielander, chief customer officer of Liebherr-Aerospace & Transportation, said: "This collaboration with ADE highlights the growing need from the aerospace industry for new digital solutions that we can provide. These new predictors, based on our vast OEM and customer service experience, will fit perfectly into ADE's current offer and match with their objective to support fleet performance." (Photo Egyptair Engineering & Maintenance)

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Akasa Air selects ST Engineering

Singapore-based MRO ST Engineering has signed a 15-year exclusive maintenance contract with India's Akasa Air, covering the CFM International LEAP-1B engines fitted to the carrier's Boeing 737 MAX fleet.

Under the agreement, ST Engineering will provide Performance Restoration Shop Visits (PRSV) for Akasa Air's LEAP-1B engines at its facility in Singapore. The contract covers Akasa's 25 current aircraft, as well as the 201 further examples the airline expects to receive over the next eight years.

Tay Eng Guan, senior vice president and head of engine services at ST Engineering, commented: "ST Engineering's appointment as Akasa Air's exclusive LEAP-1B engine MRO solutions provider for the first PRSV service reflects strong confidence in our deep expertise and ability to be a trusted long-term partner. This milestone partnership also underlines our growing support for the LEAP-1B engines, and our commitment to help airlines focus on their operations and business growth while we maintain their engines."

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Letters to the editor

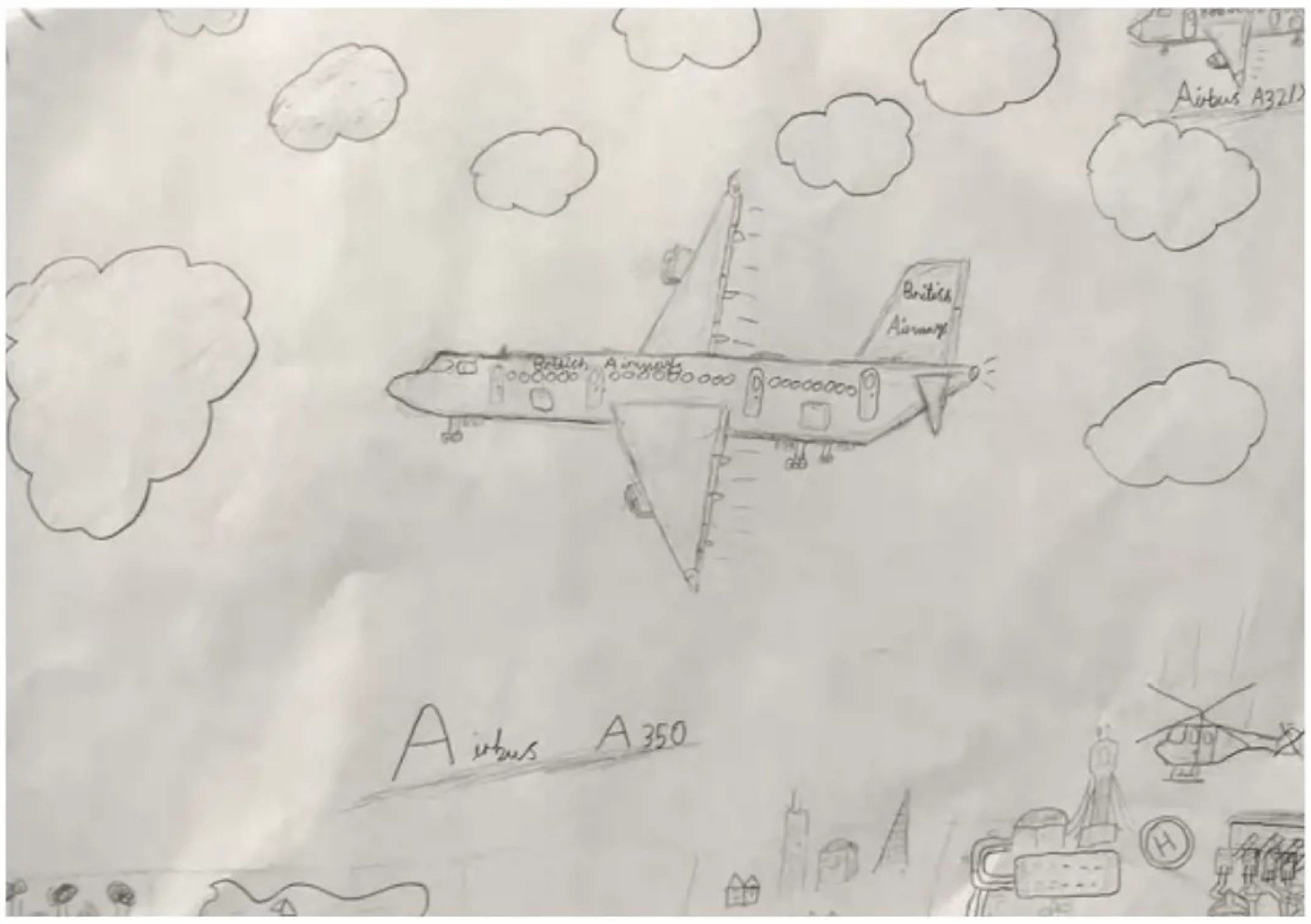
Dear Editor,
My name is Eric and I am ten years old. I am a huge fan of *Airliner World*! I particularly enjoyed the *21st Century Airliners* special that came with my subscription. I love going to watch the planes arriving at the Heathrow southern runway 27L where you can get very close to the planes.

I want to be a pilot when I grow up. It's my ambition to fly the Airbus A350, although my favourite aircraft is the Boeing 747. My favourite airline is British Airways.

My drawing is of an Airbus A350 and an A321XLR, I hope you like it!

Thanks,
Eric

Ed: Thank you so much for sending us your picture, Eric! I think it's particularly apt that you've included an A321XLR in your drawing, given that it's the centrepiece of this issue. It's fantastic to hear you're a fan of *Airliner World*, and we really appreciate your support through a subscription. We wish you every success in becoming a pilot!



Dear Editor,
I spent 47 years working for BEA/British Airways in various customer service and training roles. I was 15 years old when I became a postal messenger for BEA. I was fascinated by aircraft and became a "spotter" watching planes fly over my school on their way to Heathrow.

Using my airline concessions I have been fortunate to fly all over the world on many different aircraft types. My first flight, in 1964, was on a Swissair Caravelle from LHR to Zurich. My latest one was on a BA A320neo from Athens to LHR.

Airliner World helps me keep up with the latest in civil aviation and is the best way of ensuring this. Thanks for such an interesting magazine which goes from strength to strength.

Kind regards,
Ron Johnson

Ed: Thank you for your kind words, Ron – it's great to hear that *Airliner World* helps you in this way.

Baby Bus bows out

Romanian flag carrier TAROM has retired its final Airbus A318, leaving Air France as the type's only remaining commercial operator. A quartet of the so-called 'Baby Bus' – named because it is the smallest variant of the A320 Family – was delivered to the Bucharest-based airline between 2006 and 2007. Two of the 120-seat narrowbodies were scrapped in 2022 and 2023, while the remaining pair was placed into storage in July and most recently November 2024.

Air France currently holds a fleet of six examples, although only five are in active service. Delivered at the same time as TAROM's airframes, the French carrier has been replacing the ageing jets with brand-new A220-300s as they arrive.

Only 80 examples of the jet were ever produced, making it a rarity among its narrowbody peers. Past major users of the type included launch customer Frontier Airlines, Avianca Brasil and Mexicana. Notably, between 2009 and 2020, British Airways used a pair of the jets configured in an all-business class cabin, to operate flights between London/City and New York/JFK.

It's not clear how much longer the A318 will remain in service with Air France, but the opportunities to fly on the quirky type are reducing. Have you flown on it? Let us know about your experience! (Photo Key Collection)

TAROM
TRANSPORTURILE AERIENE ROMANE
YR-ASA

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Do you have a historical tale, burning question, or comment about the magazine to share with our global audience? Get in touch via airlinerworld@keypublishing.com with the subject 'Letters to the Editor', or drop us a message on Facebook.com/AirlinerWorld, on Twitter @_AirlinerWorld or join the debate on our Key.Aero forum. As we return to the editorial office, we are also able to welcome letters once again – the postal address is: ***Airliner World*****, PO Box 100, Stamford, Lincolnshire, PE9 1XQ**

The latest training aids available for the aviation professional

Skyborne soars with DHL

Gloucestershire-based Skyborne Airline Academy has partnered with DHL on a fully-funded integrated Airline Transport Pilot License (ATPL) course for DHL Air UK employees.

The first two candidates from the airline's East Midlands base have joined Skyborne to commence their UK Civil Aviation Authority integrated ATPL course, before becoming first officers on one of DHL Air UK's fleet of Boeing aircraft. The pair are Jordan Brown, who has worked within DHL's HR department for six years, and Jamie McKenzie, who has been with the company for nine years, most recently as an aircraft ground handler.

Lee Woodward, CEO of the flight school, said: "At Skyborne, we're strong advocates of making pilot training accessible for all, regardless of background. Our partnership with DHL Air UK continues this drive to remove financial barriers to entry and encourage greater diversity in our industry."

Debbie Moore, head of talent management and development at DHL Air UK, added: "We're delighted to be partnering with Skyborne for our first ever sponsored flight training initiative. With graduates from the academy already flying with DHL, we knew we were making the right choice. This cadet pilot programme gives an opportunity of a lifetime to our team members, who could not otherwise afford the dream. Thanks to our funding and Skyborne's expertise, our employees can pursue a pilot career with confidence."

DHL Air UK operates a fleet of 21 aircraft, including five Boeing 757-200s, nine 767-300s and seven 777Fs. (Photo Skyborne Airline Academy)

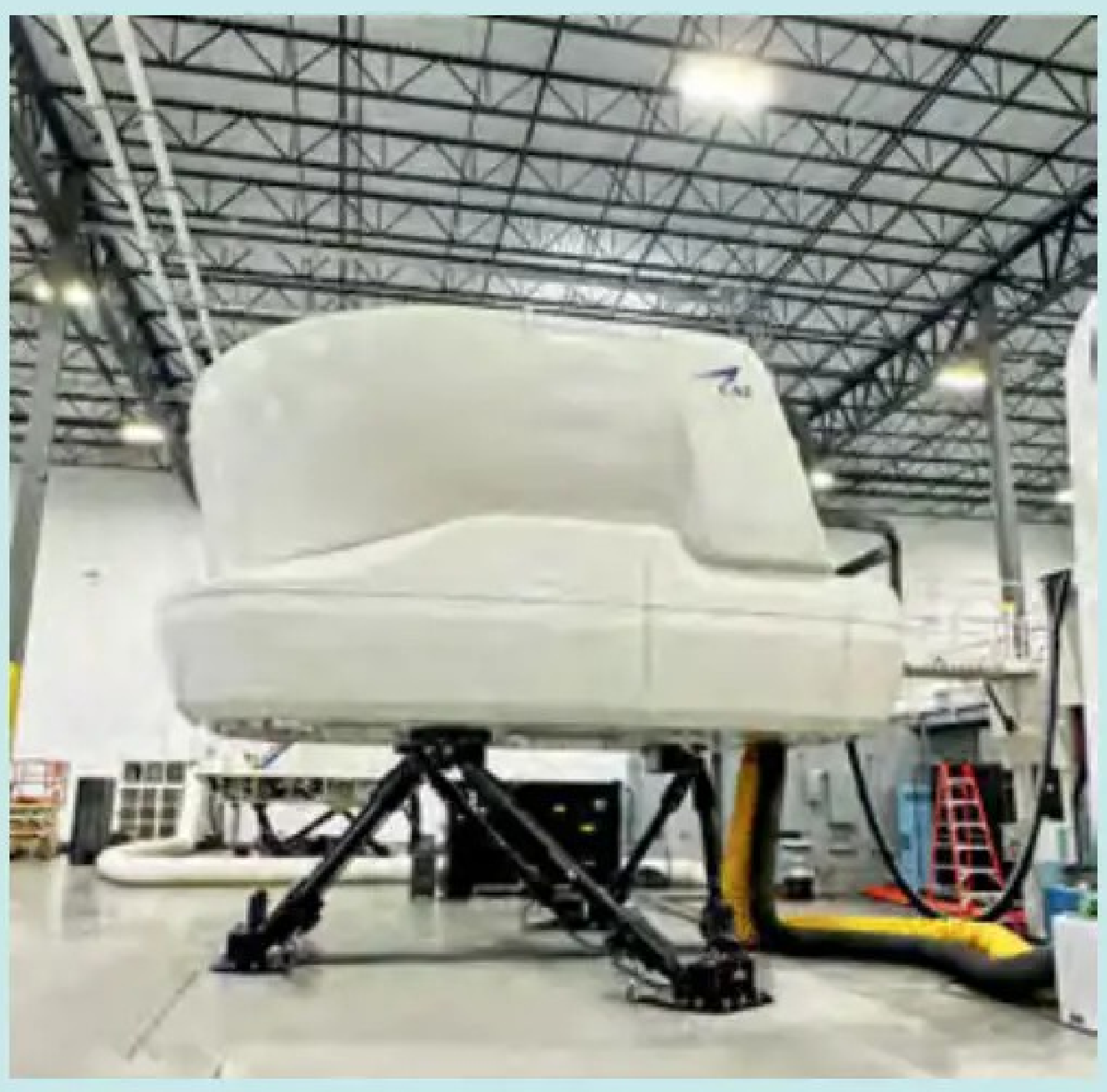
New A330 sim for Pan Am

Pan Am Flight Academy has added an Airbus A330 full flight simulator (FFS) to its Miami Training Center, as it attempts to meet growing demand for widebody pilot training. The state-of-the-art Level D device is equipped to simulate all three engine options for the A330ceo: Rolls-Royce Trent, General Electric CF6 and Pratt & Whitney PW4000.

"We are continuously investing in technology to address the evolving needs of the aviation community," said Jeff Portanova, president of Pan Am Flight Academy. "The addition of this A330 simulator underscores our commitment to providing world-class training solutions that prepare pilots for the complexities of modern aviation. This expansion allows us to better serve our global customer base, offering the flexibility and advanced tools that today's aviation professionals demand."

This new A330 simulator joins Pan Am's existing A320 simulator, bringing the total number of simulators at the Miami Axis Park facility to ten, with 23 across all of Pan Am locations globally.

Training sessions on the new A330 simulator were set to begin in November 2024, providing airlines, commercial operators and individuals with the opportunity to enhance their pilot skills in one of the most advanced simulators available.



As the sole surviving division of the original Pan American World Airways, Pan Am Flight Academy's heritage traces back to the earliest days of airline flight training. Founded in 1980, its headquarters are in Miami, Florida. (Photo Pan Am Flight Academy)

Eve of a new era

Brazilian eVTOL start-up Eve Air Mobility has selected Embraer-CAE Training Services (ECTS), a joint-venture between its parent company and CAE, to be the training provider for the pilots, maintenance technicians and ground handling personnel of its electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft.

Luiz Mauad, vice president of customer services at Eve, said: "We are delighted to partner with ECTS, which will ensure pilots, maintenance technicians and ground crew will receive top-notch training for safe and efficient operation of our eVTOL aircraft. This partnership not only underscores our commitment to safety and operational excellence, but also equips our operators' teams with the necessary skills to offer outstanding customer service."

Eve has the industry's largest backlog or aircraft orders, with letters of intent (LOI) for 2,900 eVTOLs from 30 customers in 13 countries, representing a potential $14.5bn in sales revenue. Its aircraft utilises eight dedicated rotors for vertical flight and fixed wings to fly in cruise, with no change in the position of these components during flight. The concept includes an electric pusher powered by dual electric motors that provide propulsion redundancy.

Alexandre Prevost, CAE's president of Business Aviation Training and an ECTS board member, added: "As part of the long-term agreement, CAE will be responsible for producing all equipment and courseware for pilot, maintenance and ground handling training for Eve Air Mobility. CAE continues to make significant investments in AAM to deliver innovative and immersive products and training solutions that are specifically tailored to the industry and today's learners." (Photo Eve Air Mobility)

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ABOVE: ***Boeing 737-3H4, N619SW (c/n 28035), was previously flown by Southwest Airlines between 1995 and 2017, when it was acquired by Coulson Aviation and converted for firefighting tasks*** AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ DANIEL KOTRONIS

Australian investigators have released the final report into a non-fatal incident which saw a Coulson Aviation Boeing 737 impact a ridgeline during a firefighting operation in Western Australia.

The crash, which occurred on February 6, 2023, involved 737-3H4, N619SW (c/n 28035). Both pilots, who were the only occupants of the jet, miraculously walked away with only minor injuries.

The flight

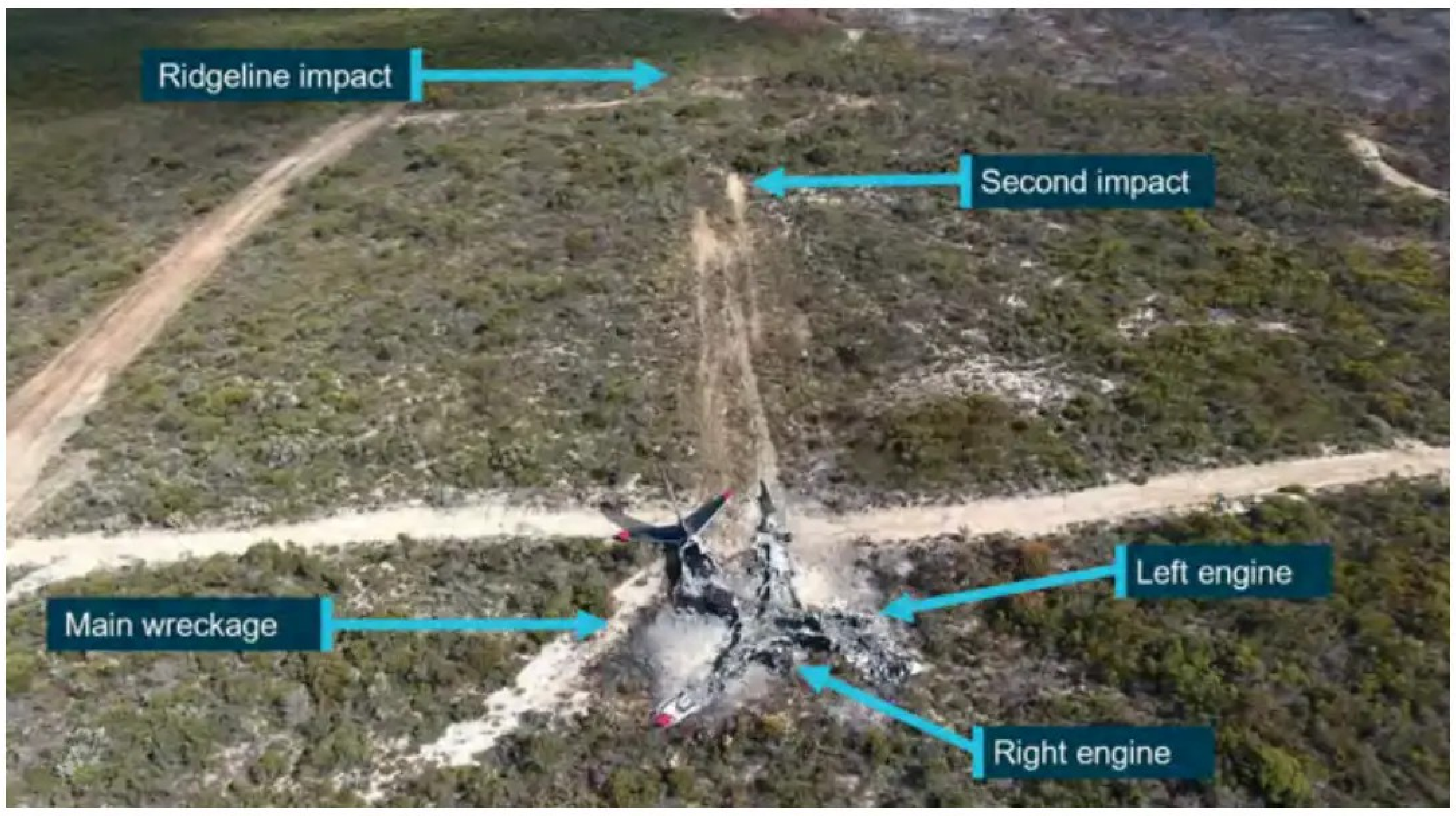
At about 1532hrs local time, the jet – which is classified as a large air tanker (LAT) – with a callsign Bomber 139, took off from Brusselton Airport located about 120 miles south of Perth, on a firefighting task in Fitzgerald River National Park some 250 miles to the east. The captain was in the left seat and undertaking pilot flying (PF) duties, while the first officer (FO) was in the right seat occupied by pilot monitoring (PM) tasks.

After being cleared to enter the fire zone not above 2,500ft, the FO advised the captain of the retardant drop speeds, which included a target speed of 133kts. The commander then reported having BD123 in sight – the birddog aircraft responsible for managing the fireground.

BD123 then asked Bomber 139 if they wanted a show-me run (a low-level pass made over the target using the physical location of the aircraft to demonstrate the line and start point of the retardant drop) or whether they could just follow them straight to the drop, which would be a lead profile – which would see the 737 follow 0.25 miles behind the birddog aircraft, below 500ft above ground level (AGL). The captain of Bomber 139 decided on the latter.

BD123 was notified by the captain of Bomber 139 that their target speed would be 135kts for final. Flap 40 was then deployed by the 737 crew and BD123 briefed the pilots of the jet on the drop which included advice of a straight exit, the absence of hazards, a downhill approach, and a target altitude initially of 500ft, descending to 400ft.

The drop was completed without incident, reaching a minimum height of 78ft and a minimum computed airspeed of 124kts. The captain reported the partial drop to BD123, and another lead profile was set up to tag and extend the first drop with the remaining retardant. The FO subsequently re-calculated and reported the new drop speed to be 118kts. The FO reported that 40° of flap was set, and the pre-drop checklist was completed. For the second time, the captain reported uncertainty to the first officer about the approach path BD123 was taking. The birddog pilot then provided the following commentary: "This is final, fully retardant drop out here in a second, standby, [pause], retardant's right at our 12 o'clock, [pause], 3, 2, 1, tag and extend existing retardant". According to the ATSB report, the captain told interviewers that the second approach was conducted through drift smoke from the fire, and they were unable to identify the target

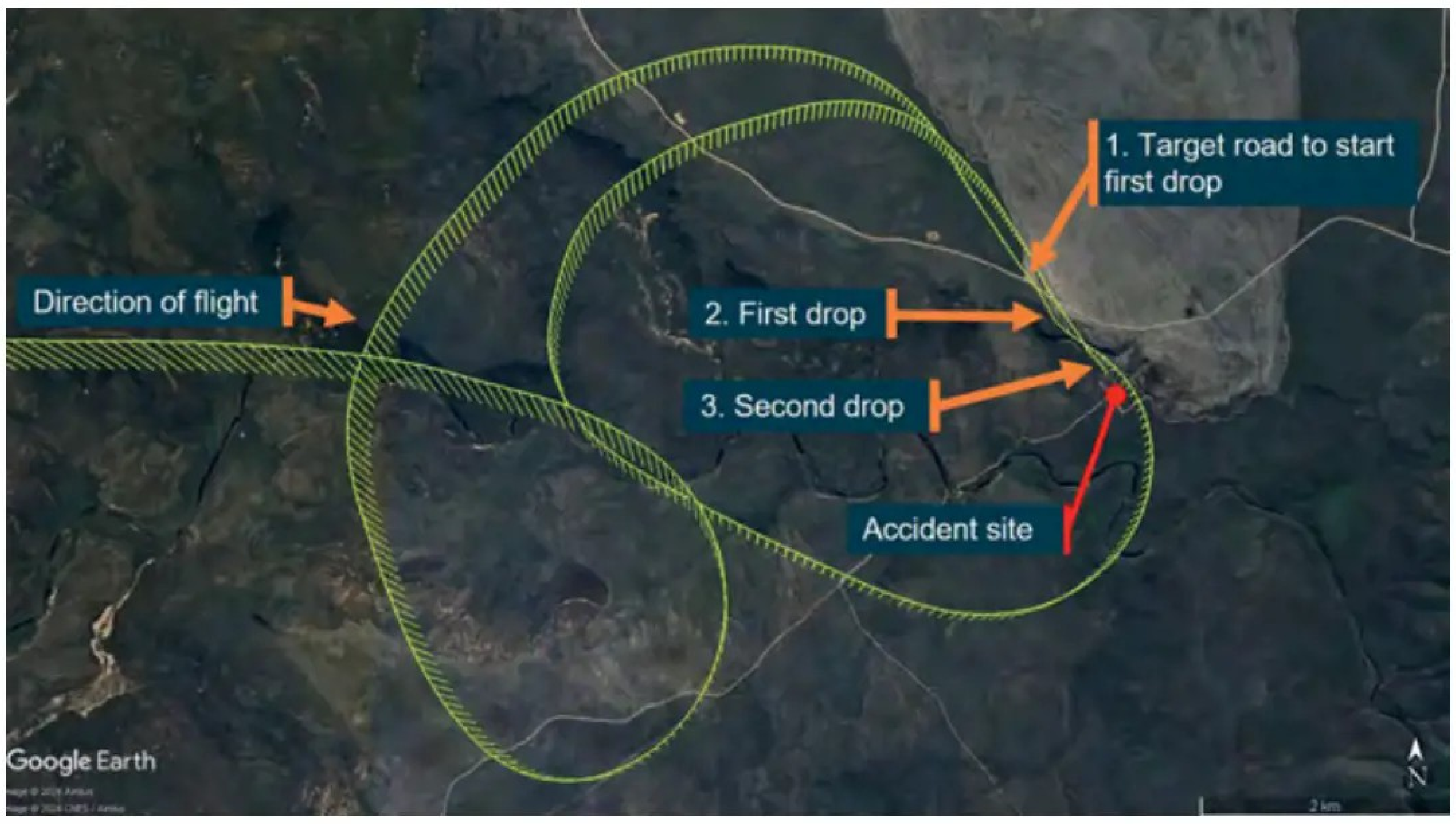


RIGHT: ***An overhead shot depicting the second impact and main wreckage*** ATSB

until they exited from the smoke, which was at the start of the drop. The FO reported not being able to see the target on final until BD123 deployed smoke over the location.

During the second drop, Bomber 139 descended to a minimum height of 57ft at 110kts and about 30% N1 (high idle power) as the retardant line was extended downhill. The aircraft recovered to a height of 81ft at 107kts at the end of the drop at which stage the captain had started to advance the thrust levers. The FO had their hand on the flap lever in anticipation of a flap retraction call from the captain.

The engines did not immediately respond to the movement of the thrust levers and the captain started to pitch the nose up, which resulted in the reversal of the rate of descent and a decay in airspeed. The captain announced "fly the airplane" followed immediately at about 1614hrs, by the activation of the stick shaker and impact with a ridgeline at an elevation of about 222ft at 104kts with the engines at 85-90% N1.



"After the impact with the ridgeline, the aircraft cleared a small line of foliage before impacting the ground a second time and then sliding to rest," the ATSB report said. After motion has ceased, the FO started the evacuation checklist. Both pilots were unable to open the cabin door and the first officer couldn't open the right-side window. The pair exited the aircraft through the left-side window. They were rescued by a helicopter involved in the fire control activities. Miraculously, they suffered only minor injuries, but the aircraft was destroyed.

Findings

Through its investigation of the crash, the ATSB found that the accident drop was conducted at a low height and airspeed downhill, which required the use of idle thrust and a high descent rate.

The report added: "The delay in the engines reaching go-around thrust at the end of the drop resulted in the aircraft's height and airspeed (energy state) decaying as it approached rising terrain, which was not expected or detected by the pilot flying."

As a result, the aircraft's speed and thrust were "insufficient to climb above a ridgeline in the exit path, which resulted in a controlled flight into terrain". The ATSB said the operator's process of recalculating, and lowering, the target drop speed after a partial release also contributed to the low energy state of the aircraft leading up to the collision with terrain.

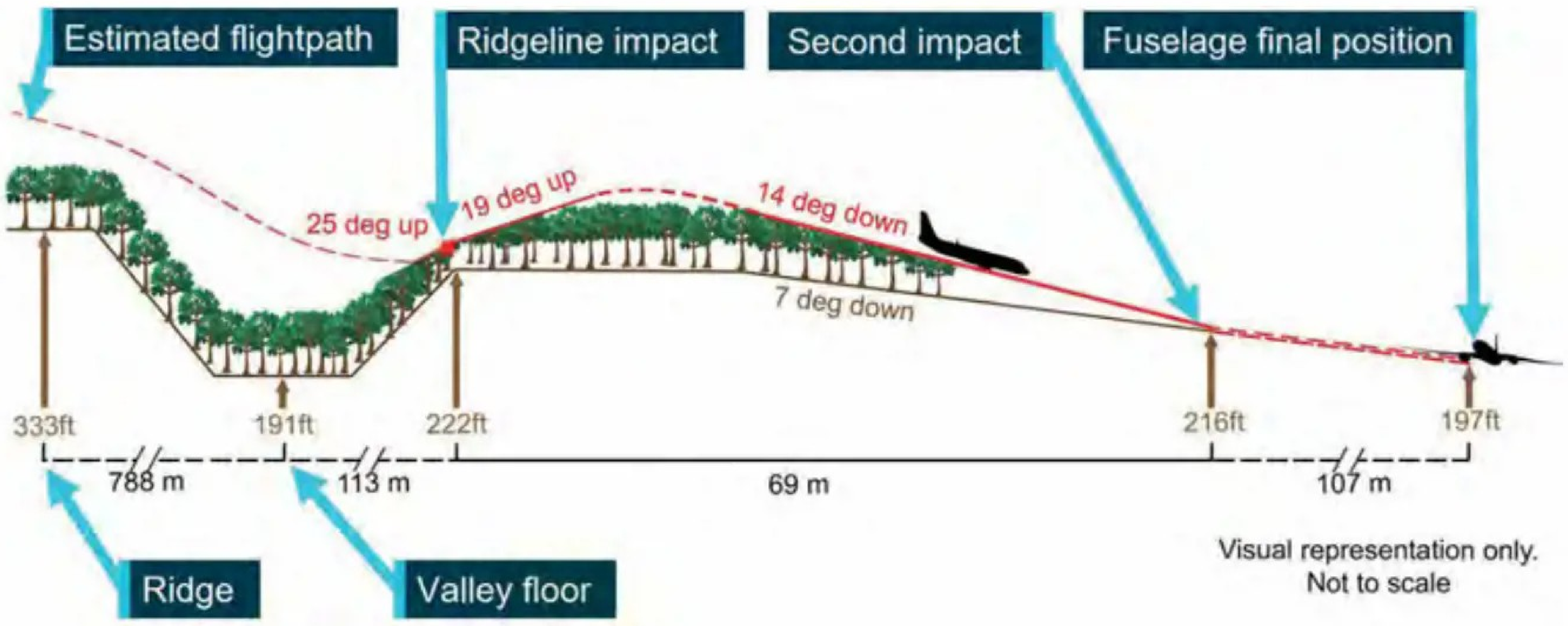
Investigators also found that the operator and tasking agency had not published a minimum drop height, which resulted in the first officer, who did not believe there was a minimum drop height, not making any announcements about the low energy state prior to the collision. The ATSB found the operator's pilot monitoring duties were reactive to the development of a low energy state and did not include callouts either before or at the minimum target parameters to reduce the risk of a low energy state developing.

In response to the report, Coulson Aviation has implemented a minimum drop height of 200ft. Meanwhile, Australia's state of Western Australia has enforced a minimum drop height for large tankers of 200ft.

National standard operating procedures for large tankers are also being developed. **AW**

ABOVE: ***Bomber 139's recorded accident flightpath at Fitzgerald River National Park*** ATSB

BELOW: ***Accident sequence distances and elevations*** ATSB



Date	Reg'n	c/n	Type	Operator	Fatalities	Location	Notes
October 7	N130GP	U-222	Beechcraft C99 Commuter	Ameriflight	1	United States	Impacted terrain after take-off from Norfolk Regional Airport, Nebraska
October 18	TC-LTL	10878	Airbus A321neo	Turkish Airlines	0	Ireland	Suffered tail strike while landing at Dublin. Landed safely after go around
October 19	P2-KAL	715	de Havilland Canada DHC-6 Twin Otter 300	Kobio Aviation	0	Papua New Guinea	Veered off runway during take-off at Kairik Airstrip and ran into ditch
October 20	PK-SMH	462	de Havilland Canada DHC-6 Twin Otter 300	SAM Air	4	Indonesia	Crashed while on approach to Panua Pohuwato Airport
October 21	B-1243	63979	Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner	China Southern Airlines	0	China	Suffered structural damage in a hard landing and tail strike incident at Guangzhou/Baiyun
October 29	PK-LEH	1693	Airbus A330-343	Flynas op by Lion Air	1	Saudi Arabia	Passenger fell and sustained fatal injuries during disembarkation via stairs

Going THE XLR MILE

As Iberia says bienvenido to the Airbus A321XLR, **Chris Sloan** heads to Madrid to discover for himself how this game-changer might shake up the skies

D-AVYR
11504
IBERIA

On November 14, 2024, Iberia flight 347 witnessed the world's first Airbus A321XLR enter long-haul service, departing Madrid/Barajas for Boston/Logan and ushering in a new era of long distance narrowbody flying. Extended range flights on single-aisle aircraft are hardly an innovation, bearing in mind the de Havilland Comets, Boeing 707s, and Douglas DC-8s from the dawn of the Jet Age. The last single-aisle aircraft optimised for long-haul was the graceful but commercially unsuccessful Vickers VC10. From the 1970s onwards, long-haul became the domain of the widebody.

Narrowbodies enjoyed an unexpected long-haul renaissance in the early 1990s when extended range twin operations (ETOPS) certified Boeing 757-200s began flying long thin transatlantic routes for United Airlines and Continental Airlines. With a range up to 3,900nm and carrying up to a certified 239-passenger payload, the 757 carved itself a niche for which it wasn't initially designed. After manufacturing just 1,050 airframes, Boeing prematurely cancelled the 757 programme in 2003, delivering the final aircraft to Shanghai Airlines in April 2005. In retrospect, this ill-advised action left a gaping hole in the market that would take nearly 15 years to fill and two decades to exceed. Boeing's much speculated, middle-of-the-market 757/767 replacement has yet to emerge – its answer is the 737 MAX 10 variant, which comes up short at 230 passengers and 3,100nm, and still needs to be certified.

Meanwhile, 4,900 miles away from Seattle, a quiet revolution was underway in Hamburg and Toulouse, when the first Airbus A321-100 entered service with Lufthansa in 1994. The original A321 had offered a similar capacity to the 757, but fell far short of its range at just 2,200nm. But it developed into a late bloomer, becoming a middle-of-the-market smash hit during the last decade. According to Airbus, 4,044 A320neos have been ordered since 2010, though it's been comprehensively overtaken by its stablemate launched the same year – the A321neo order book totals 6,787 examples. Over the years, the platform has been re-engined and refined to achieve a peak 4,000nm range with the A321LR, which entered service in August 2021 when JetBlue introduced a true nonstop North Atlantic service.

At the 2019 Paris Air Show, Airbus upped the LR's range by another 700nm with the launch of the longest-legged narrowbody in history, the A321XLR. With the addition of a new rear centre fuel tank (RCT), the XLR has a range of up to 4,700nm and up

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BELOW: ***Iberia's first Airbus A321XLR, seen here wearing its test registration D-AVYR (c/n 11504), departs Hamburg/ Finkenwerder*** V1IMAGES.COM/ DIRK GROTHE

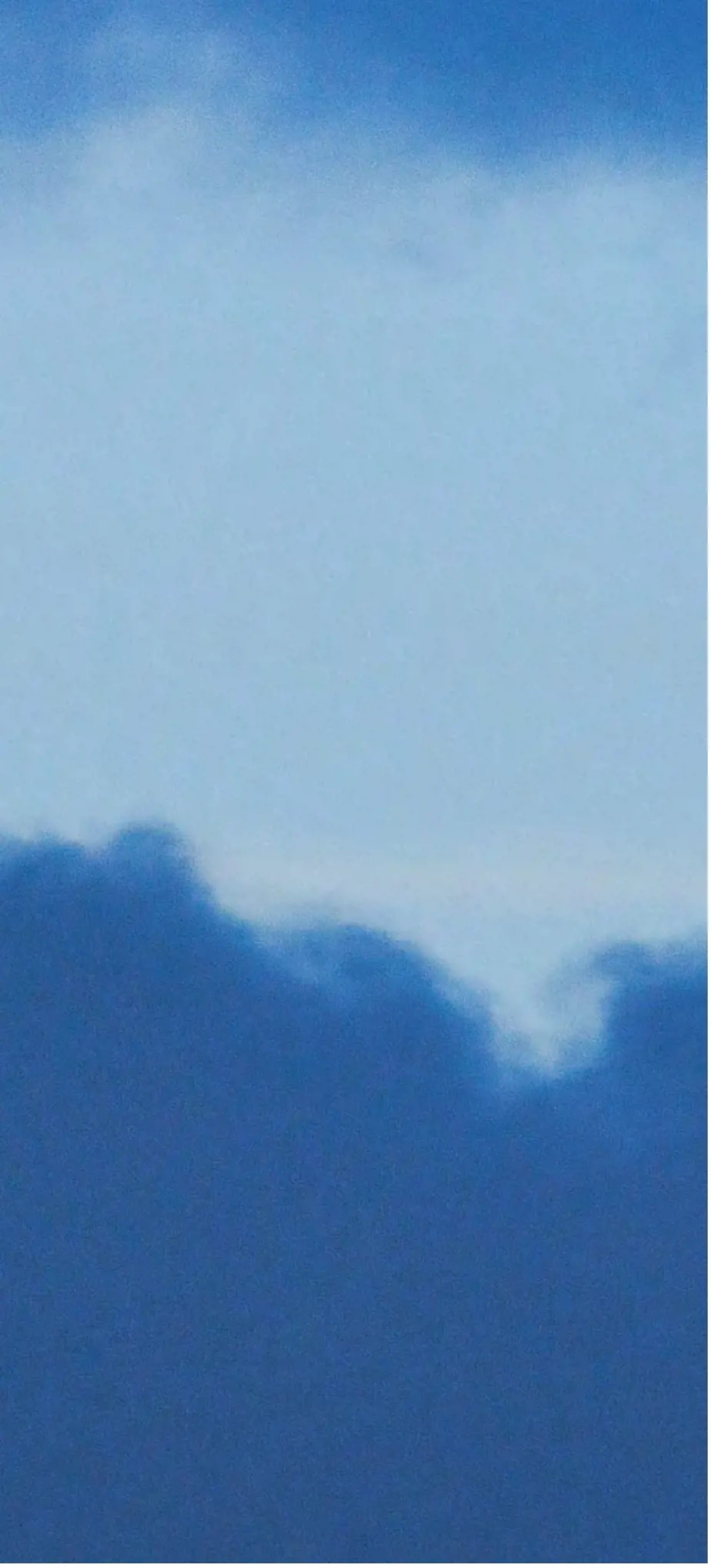
"Narrowbodies enjoyed an unexpected long-haul renaissance in the early 1990s when ETOPS-certified Boeing 757-200s began flying long thin transatlantic routes"

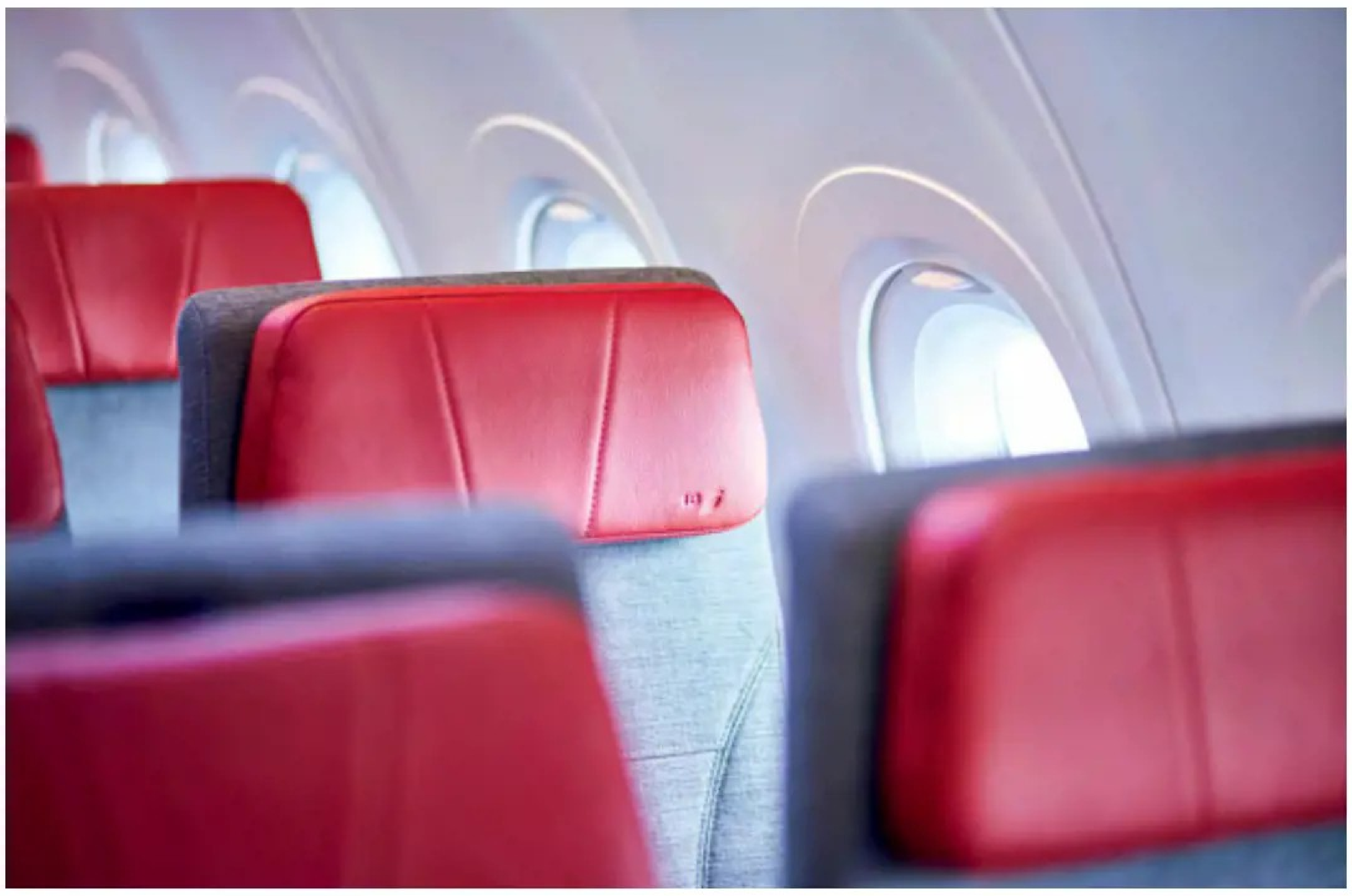
EC-OIL departing Madrid/Barajas on a short-haul proving flight in November AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/JAVIER GUERRERO

Aer Lingus's first example, EI-XLR (c/n 11348), at Hamburg/Finkenwerder in June 2024 wearing its test registration D-AZXY V1IMAGES.COM/DIRK GROTHE

to 11 hours of nonstop flying time, albeit with 25% less cargo payload than the 757. Airbus claims it will burn 30% less fuel per seat than previous generation competitor aircraft and at roughly half the trip cost of modern widebodies. Airlines and lessors responded enthusiastically, ordering 142 examples that week in Paris, which has now increased to 516 orders from 25 customers, according to data supplied by ch-aviation.

The A321XLR is destined to reshape international long-haul networks and Antonio Da Costa, VP of single-aisle marketing at Airbus, trumpeted the market-fragmenting, hub-and-spoke-busting advantages of the XLR over a widebody: "It enables airlines to operate routes with low traffic, which would be unprofitable with a widebody. This transformation allows airlines to suddenly open new thin





routes that, before, they could not afford to put a widebody onto at all or year-round. Increasing the frequency of existing routes by replacing a widebody with a smaller, narrow-gauge aircraft is another key selling point. You're able to go from a secondary destination straight to the primary location without having to go through a stop."

Increasing the frequency of existing routes by replacing a widebody with the smaller XLR – like a two-for-one swap – is another key selling point.

TOP RIGHT: ***The 14-seat herringbone business cabin populated with Thompson VantageSOLO seats*** IBERIA

RIGHT: ***The economy cabin offers Recaro R3 seats with a 4in recline and leather headrests*** IBERIA

Spooling up

After the first of three XLR prototypes flew in June 2022, the aircraft embarked on a two-year flight testing and certification campaign. By July 2024, the trio of test aircraft had performed more than 510 flights, totalling around 1,450 flight test hours, as well as ground tests, with the ultimate goal of gaining European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) type certification.

Regulators insisted on adding additional safety features for the RCT to make the lower middle section of the fuselage resistant to potential fires caused by fuel spillage outside the aircraft. In addition, Airbus was advised to consider using a flammability reduction or fire hotspot mitigation system to meet FAA requirements. This translated to a weight penalty of 800kg and a range deficit of 200nm from the original specification. The modifications also caused the original 2023 entry-into-service date to slip by an entire year, which led to some cancellations. Frontier aborted its order for 18 XLRs and JetBlue deferred and deleted most of its commitment for 13 airframes, although financial factors and shifting commercial priorities at both carriers undoubtedly played a part.

In October 2023, Airbus completed a six-hour passenger demonstration with the full cabin prototype aircraft, F-WWAB (c/n 11080), loaded with 200 Airbus employees, comprising 167 staff members acting as passengers, 22 experts and 11 Airbus flight test and cabin crew on board.

On July 18, 2024, Airbus rolled out the first of Iberia's eight A321XLRs from its Hamburg paint shop. The following day, the eve of the Farnborough Airshow, brought even better news as the XLR powered by CFM LEAP-1A engines received its type certification from EASA, paving the way for its entry into service. The Pratt & Whitney Geared Turbofan-powered XLR is pushing towards type certification by the end of 2024. The manufacturer ultimately stuck to the 4,700nm range, although Gary O'Donnell, Airbus head of the A321XLR programme, conceded: "We still can meet everything that we have sold for 90% of city pairs." He also claimed Airbus had a couple of ideas about how to claw at least half of the remaining 10% back over the next two years, with the balance to follow.

The world's first XLR handover on October 30 was a low-key affair in Hamburg. Marco Sansavini, CEO and chairman at Iberia, said: "We are very proud to be the launch airline for this new Airbus aircraft. The A321XLR will allow us to reach new destinations, operating transoceanic routes and doing so in a more efficient way."

Christian Scherer, CEO of Commercial Aircraft at Airbus, added: "Five years in the making, the newest member of the Airbus family truly opens a new chapter in air connectivity. It is another »

"The A321XLR is destined to reshape international long-haul networks"

LEFT: ***Marco Sansavini (right), CEO and chairman of Iberia, at the A321XLR press launch on November 13, 2024*** IBERIA

IBERIA
A321XLR
Primero con Iberia

LEFT: ***Iberia says bienvenido at the launch of the Airbus A321XLR in Madrid*** IBERIA

proud 'first' for all of us at Airbus in our constant quest to innovate and bring value to our customers. Gracias y felicidades, Iberia."

The manufacturer has yet to reveal detailed plans for the XLR production ramp-up, but if it reaches its A320neo Family target rate of 75 aircraft per year by 2026, then 15-20% of production capacity could be allocated to the XLR.

Some airline customers have dubbed the XLR a 'Swiss Army knife' and salivated over its game-changing flexibility. Brian Znotins, senior VP of network planning at American Airlines, referred to the rollout of its first XLR with a short post on social media, simply stating: "Rubs hands together in anticipation."

Much like the 787 fragmented the market by bypassing hubs with new point-to-point routes, the XLR is poised to do the same thing with a single-aisle platform. Airbus has promoted the catalytic potential of the XLR to create 350 new city pairs by 2030 – pioneering new routes, particularly connecting secondary cities with hubs, are the most attractive offerings. Airline network planners have an array of XLR strategies: converting seasonal routes to year-round, adding capacity and frequency to existing sectors, premium seating, transforming routes too thin for widebodies and fleet renewal, replacing ageing 757s and possibly 767s.

Rollout

Launch customer Iberia has eight examples on order and will first use the XLR to replace and supplement its A330s, to allow more frequency on routes with higher seasonal demand, such as Madrid-Boston. Some seasonal routes, beginning with Madrid-Washington, will switch to year-round services from January 2025 with the arrival of the second XLR, EC-OLE (c/n 11686), in December 2024.

Aer Lingus, with eight A321LRs in operation and six XLRs on order, forfeited the launch customer title to its IAG sibling following a pilot pay dispute. With that settled, the airline's COO, Adrian Dunne, said the company will take delivery of its first two aircraft during the fourth quarter of 2024. The consolation prize for Aer Lingus is that it will be the first XLR operator to pioneer new routes. Starting in April, Nashville will be served four times per week year-round, except for a six-week break during January and February. In May, Indianapolis will become the second route, and the only nonstop link between the midwest city and Europe, with four weekly flights restoring a connectivity that was lost years ago.

Air Canada is eagerly awaiting the arrival of its fleet of 30 XLRs from late 2025, with Mark Galardo, EVP of revenue and network planning, saying: "We've got a lot of tick marks to make this aircraft a so-called game-changer for us." Strategies include first opening new markets like Montreal to Dakar in Senegal, and secondary services to destinations in Europe, such as Marseilles, France. Second, right-sizing markets deemed too small to be served year-round by a widebody, such as Porto in Portugal, and secondary

BELOW: ***The first XLR, F-WXLR (c/n 11000), in special 'Flying Xtra Long Range' colours, made its maiden flight from Hamburg/Finkenwerder on June 15, 2022*** AIRBUS/SYLVAIN RAMADIER

flying xtra long range
XLR
A321 AIRBUS
F-WXLR

"Some airline customers have dubbed the XLR a 'Swiss Army knife' and salivated over its game-changing flexibility"

European markets like Montreal-Toulouse. Galardo confirmed: "We've got our eyes on a bunch of them." Air Canada will also boost frequency and bring premium products to transcontinental flights across Canada and the US, replacing widebodies.

American Airlines, globally the largest Airbus A320 Family operator, is preparing to induct the first of 50 XLRs in the next few months. The world's biggest airline desperately needs the type to replace long-haul capacity lost by the retirement of its 757s, 767s and A330s before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, the XLR will replace the airline's self-titled A321T sub-fleet configured for premium heavy transcontinental runs, offering a 20-seat *Flagship* business class suite in a 1-1 layout, a 12-seat premium economy and 123-seats in the main economy cabin. Long-haul transatlantic routes won't begin until late 2025 or early 2026, and although none have been announced, there is speculation they will be assigned to connect secondary cities such as Raleigh in North Carolina with London. In addition, they may link larger hubs like Philadelphia and Chicago to new and existing European secondary destinations or else convert seasonal routes to year-round.

Icelandair will eventually replace its 13-strong 757 fleet with 13 XLRs, but until their arrival in 2029, the carrier is leasing four A321LRs ahead of the summer 2025 season. "The west coast of the United States, and destinations such as Dubai in the Middle East and destinations in Asia will be within our reach," said Icelandair CEO Bogi Nils Bogason.

LATAM Airlines expects to receive its five airframes in 2026 and projects

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A321XLR orders

Customer	No.
IndiGo	69
American Airlines	50
United Airlines	50
Wizz Air	47
Qantas	40
Air Lease Corporation	30
Etihad Airways	20
AirAsia X	20
VietJetAir	20
Air Arabia	20
GECAS	17
Saudia	15
JetSMART	14
Icelandair	13
JetBlue Airways	13*
SKY Airline (Chile)	10
Air Canada	10
Cebu Pacific Air	10
BOC Aviation	10
flynas	10
Iberia	8
Aer Lingus	6
LATAM Airlines Group	5
Aviation Capital Group	5
Middle East Airlines	4
Total	516

Source: ch-aviation *Deferred/cancelled unknown number

N321UA
UNITED

LEFT: ***United Airlines* has 50 XLRs due to start arriving in late 2025 or early 2026** AIRBUS

BELOW: ***The XLR beneath the aurora borealis on a route-proving polar flight*** AIRBUS/SYLVAIN RAMADIER the XLR could pioneer new routes to North America and the Caribbean from various locations in South America, but initially thought to be from Lima, Peru. According to a company spokesperson, routes to northeast Brazil, North America and Europe are being mulled over.

At the 2019 Paris Air Show, Beirut-based Middle East Airlines was the first airline to be announced as an XLR operator. The first of four leased jets is expected to be delivered in 2026 and the airline's general manager, Yassine Sabbagh, is excited about connecting Lebanon's African diaspora with Beirut: "The airplane will be used on point-to-point sectors in Africa. The lower seat cost makes it the best discovery aircraft to test new markets and operate more direct flights." Overnight links to Europe will also be in the mix if the aircraft is configured with the expected 22 lie-flat seats in the business cabin.

Australian flag carrier Qantas will induct its first batch of 28 XLRs in April 2025 and, in a similar move to American Airlines, the carrier's new jets will begin their lives replacing 737s on transcontinental routes such as Perth-Sydney. Although the XLR seems like too much aircraft for five-hour sectors, eventually international routes will be on tap. Airline CFO Rob Marcolina said that XLRs could be employed on routes from Perth to Southeast Asia and India.

With its voracious appetite for international expansion and massive orderbook to match, United Airlines has 50 XLRs due to arrive from late 2025 or early 2026. With its still uncertified 737-10s delayed by years, and a 40-strong fleet of elderly 757-200s soldiering on at an average age of 28, destined for replacement by 2030, the XLR can't come soon enough. "Generally, the A321XLR could take over existing 757 transatlantic routes and could replace or supplement a small portion of the 767 flying we do today," said a United spokesperson. These routes could link its New York/Newark and Washington hubs to secondary European spots such as Brussels, Dublin, Edinburgh, Porto, Reykjavik, Shannon and Tenerife. The carrier's Polaris premium product, developed for the 737-10, is expected to be configured on the XLR.

Low-cost revolution

Rather than connect new routes with premium cabins, the low-cost sector will cram up to 239 passengers in high-density cabins on flights lasting up to ten hours. Operators are betting that the XLR is the platform that will make low-cost long-haul flying work, where others have previously failed with widebodies. With almost 40% of XLR orders coming from low-cost players, Airbus' Antonio Da Costa stated: "We're not necessarily looking at new routes, but the capability to expand the markets on existing routes by building upon price elasticity."

Sharjah-based Air Arabia is not betting on its 20 XLRs to enter the transatlantic fray. Speaking in October at the Routes World 2024 conference in Bahrain, Air Arabia CEO Adel Ali disclosed the airline would instead further extend its operations from Morocco to the Middle East, Russia and South Africa.

Malaysia-based AirAsia unveiled plans to launch the world's first low-fare network carrier in 2024. Its bulging orderbook of 647 aircraft includes 20 XLRs for its medium- and long-haul brand AirAsia X. The carrier remains tight-lipped when it comes to details on delivery and exact routes, but it is expected to feature markets in northern and central Asia and Australia.

Having ordered 69 XLRs, IndiGo remains the largest customer, with the first aircraft expected to be delivered in the second part of 2025. The rapidly growing Indian carrier has more than 950 aircraft on order and is expanding aggressively from a predominantly domestic Indian and regional international presence to further afield in Europe and Asia. IndiGo and Air India are both challenging the Middle Eastern and European carriers who have long dominated the country's medium- and long-haul connections. Abhijit DasGupta, IndiGo's senior VP of network planning and revenue management, said the XLR will allow it to cover markets up to 8.5 hours away from the fastest-growing economy and air market globally: "This enhanced range, combined with the aircraft's capacity, positions it as a vital asset for establishing nonstop connections to several markets currently underserved from India."

DO&CO
THE GOURMET ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY
IBERIA

ABOVE: ***EC-OIL at gate S31, Madrid/Barajas Terminal 4 south, on November 14***
CHRIS SLOAN

LAT
AIRBUS A321XLR

BELOW: ***LATAM Airlines expects to receive its five airframes in 2026***
AIRBUS

Budapest-based low-cost carrier Wizz Air is also hot for the

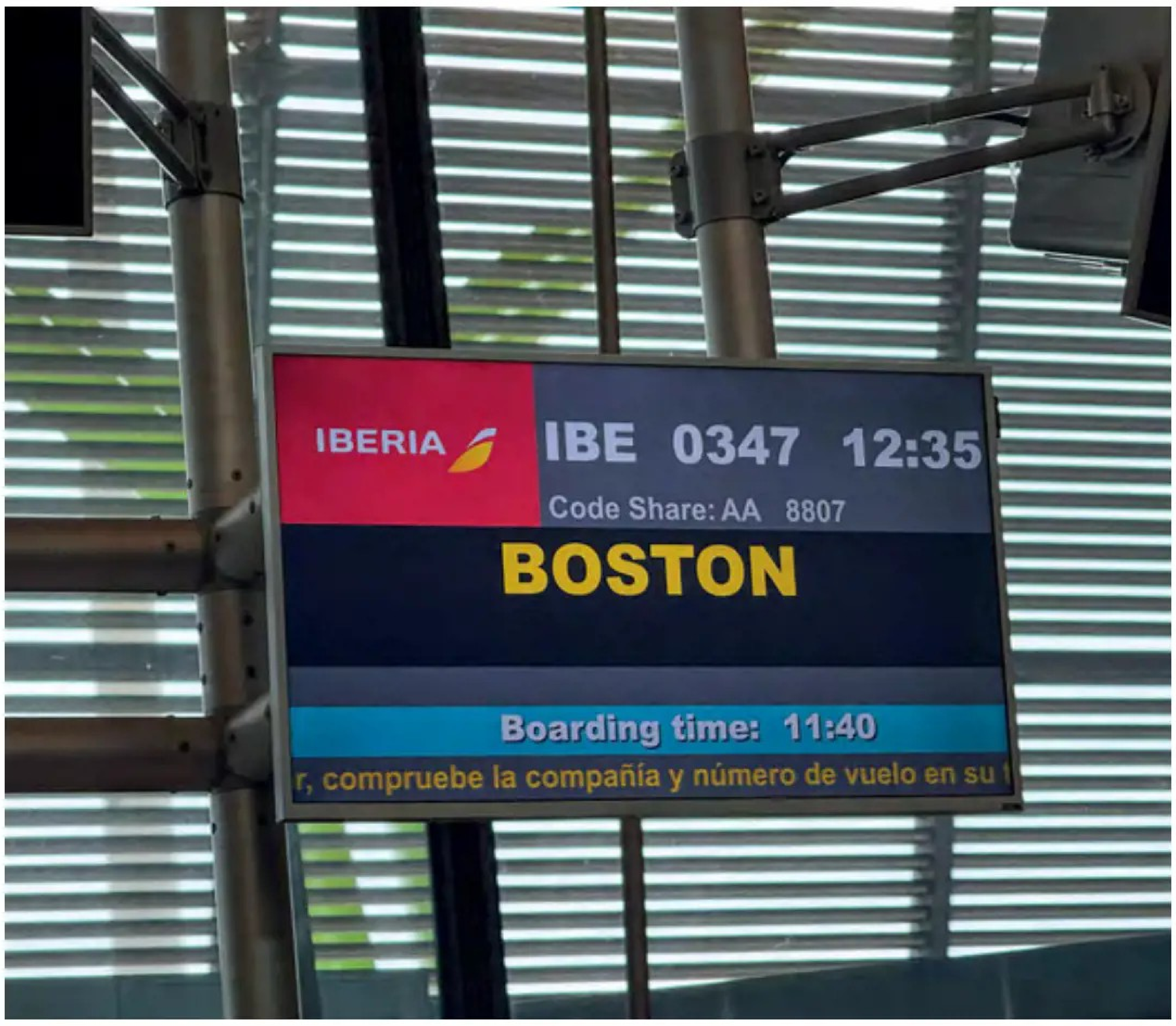
A321XLR with 47 on order and had announced its first two routes: London/Gatwick-Jeddah and Milan/Malpensa-Abu Dhabi, to debut in March and June 2025, respectively.

Other low-cost operators – Cebu Pacific (Philippines), Flynas (Saudi Arabia), VietJet Air (Vietnam) and Sky Airline (Chile) – have been less forthcoming about their plans.

Entry into service

The factory fresh aircraft, EC-OIL, first flew on October 1 and Iberia initially scheduled the commercial route-proving XLR debut from Madrid to London/Heathrow for October 28-31. As delivery slipped, the inaugural crew familiarity flight was postponed to November 6, with proving flights over the next few »

RIGHT: *Time to board IB347 for the inaugural transatlantic XLR flight to Boston* CHRIS SLOAN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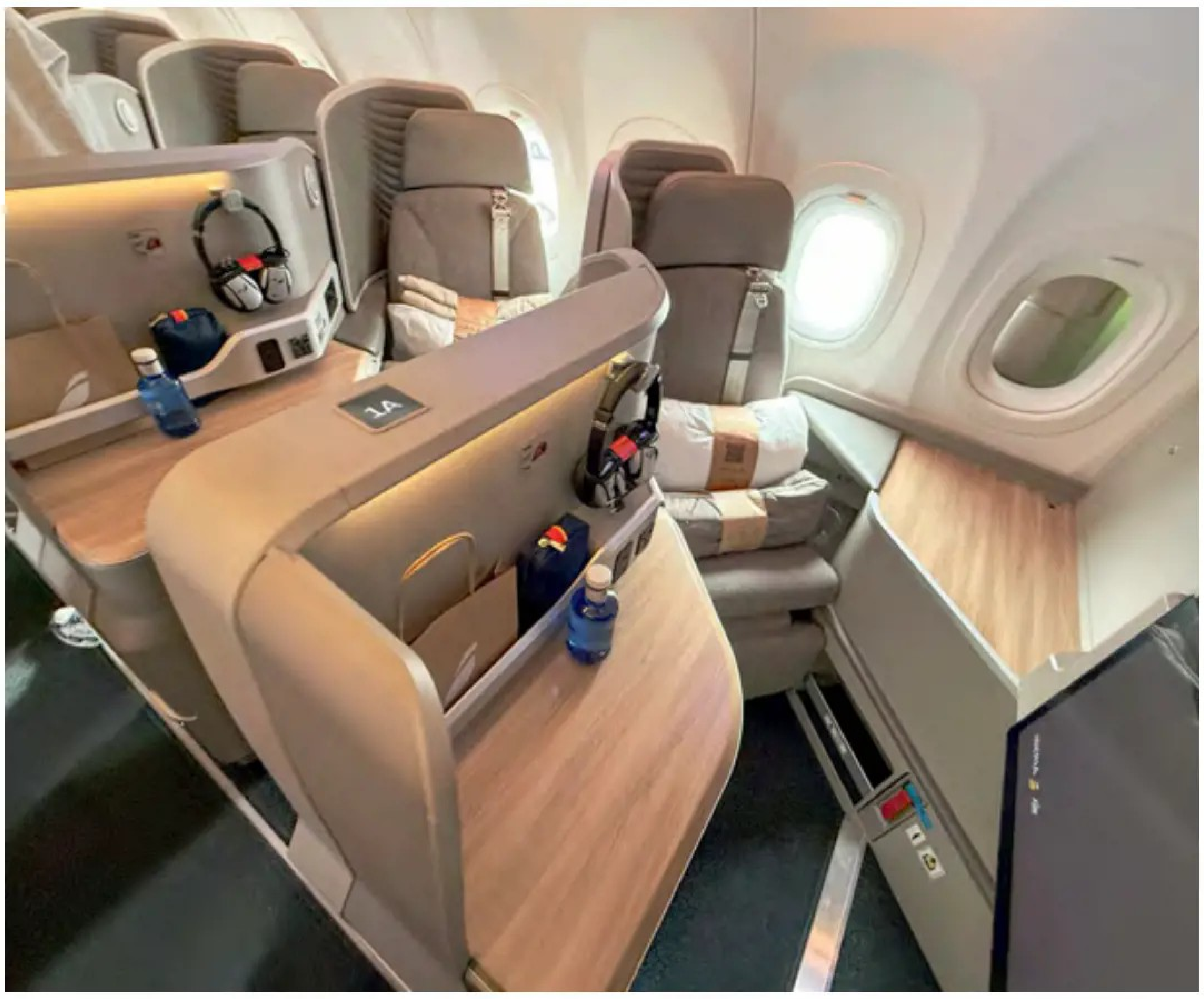
RIGHT: *The IB347 flight crew captain Beatriz Guasch Gallego, and captain Jose Luis Del Valle Castano* CHRIS SLOAN

RIGHT: *Seat 1A in the business cabin, sadly not reserved for Airliner World* CHRIS SLOAN



IBERIA
IBER
1927-1
H-5

ABOVE: ***The 168-seat economy cabin offers enhanced LED mood lighting courtesy of Airbus' Airspace cabin design*** CHRIS SLOAN

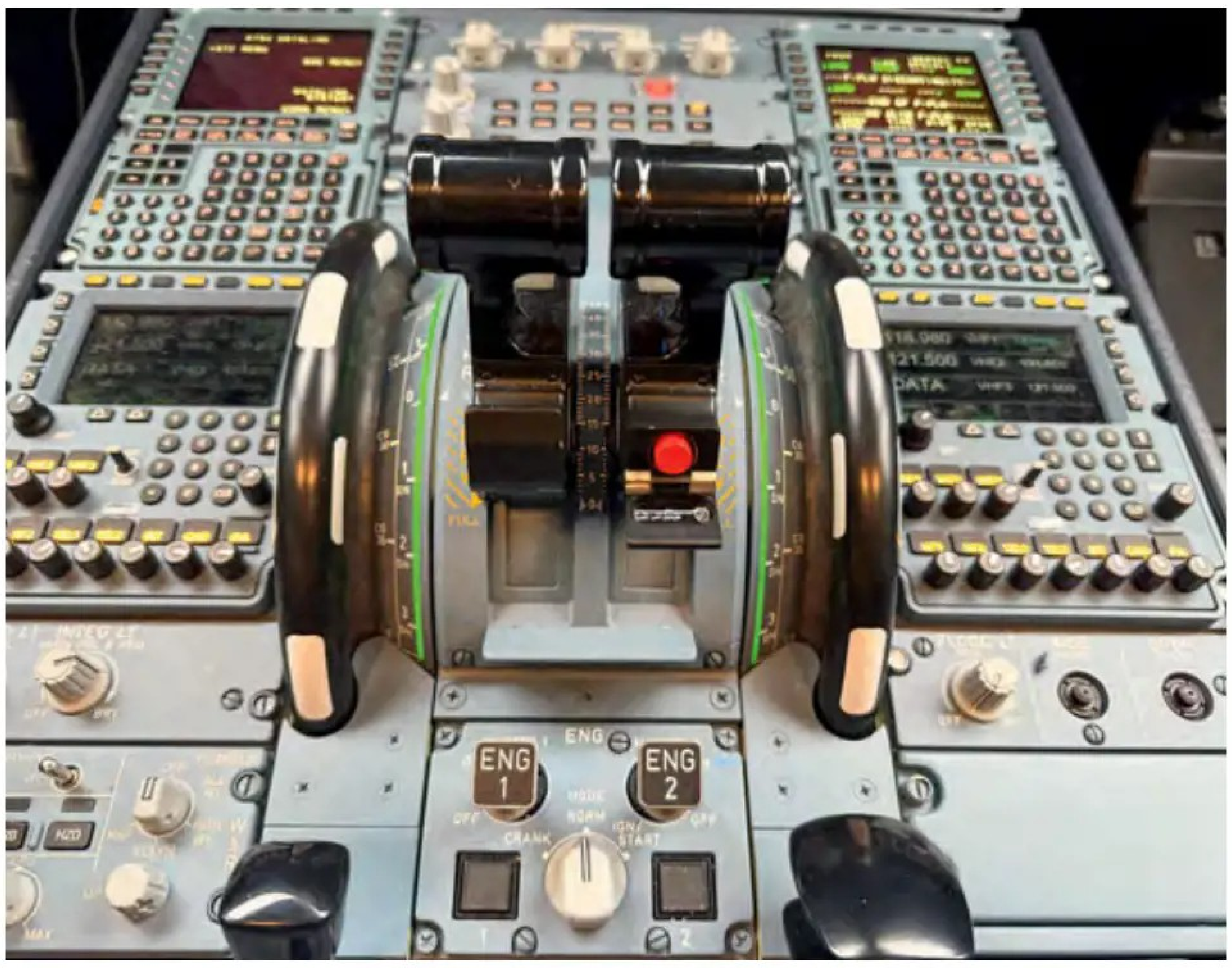
ABOVE RIGHT: ***EC-OIL was named* Iberia 1937-1939** CHRIS SLOAN

days from Madrid to Paris/Charles de Gaulle and Stockholm/Arlanda.

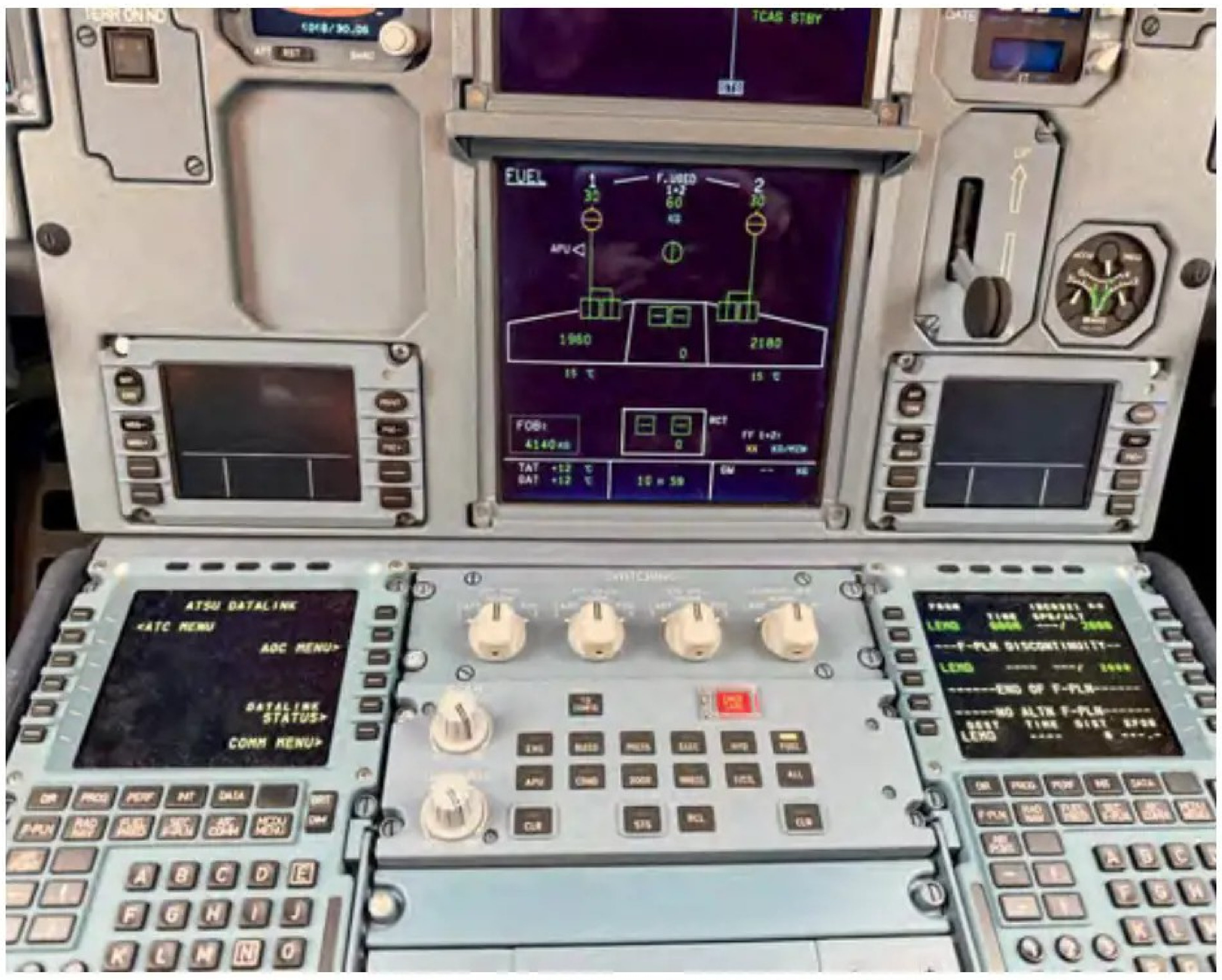
Finally, on November 14, the moment of truth arrived when EC-OIL '*Iberia 1927-1939*' – named to commemorate the airline's founding on June 28, 1927 and the beginning of its first regularly scheduled international service on May 1, 1939 which connected Madrid and Lisbon – was awarded the honour of operating the inaugural long-haul flight. Flight IB347 would see the XLR supplement an A330 on the route between Madrid and Boston, eventually upscaling services to six each week, although the 3,450nm and eight-hour block time westbound to Boston hardly taxes the XLR's capabilities. Iberia CEO Marco Sansavini will soon be announcing more routes beyond Boston and Washington, as the carrier's Flight Path 2030 plan is revealed, in readiness for the arrival of the remaining six aircraft on order by the end of 2026. The airline decided to forego any special ceremonies and catering often associated with such affairs, with nary a balloon at the gate or champagne toast onboard – even the traditional water cannon salute was bizarrely bereft of water.

Iberia's A321XLR is configured in a two-cabin layout with 182 seats, including 14 lie-flat direct access seats in business class with a 1-1 configuration, employing the herringbone Thompson VantageSOLO seat, taking advantage of the cabin width by locating seats at a traverse angle. This is the same seat that JetBlue employs in its A321LRs for its Mint-branded premium cabin. The seat pitch of 34in is very short for a lie-flat, with a lie-down length of 76in. All business seats have an 18in 4K IFE screen, yet the absence of the now vogue premium economy cabin and suite doors is conspicuous. The dense economy cabin has 168 upgraded Recaro R3 seats at a 30in pitch – increasing to a 40in pitch in premium-priced emergency row and bulkhead seats – with a 4in recline and leather headrests. The additional seat padding is welcome for longer duration flights, noticeably improving comfort. Iberia shares this layout with fellow International Airlines Group (IAG) carrier Aer Lingus, and although premium economy has been omitted, IAG doesn't rule it out in the future.

Both cabins feature Bluetooth IFE, Wi-Fi connectivity and Type A and C USB charging ports. The extra-large overhead bins with swinging hatches offer 60% additional space over their pivoting predecessors, allowing each passenger a carry-on – and



BELOW LEFT: ***The A321XLR features red thrust bump buttons to add an extra 5% thrust if needed*** CHRIS SLOAN



BELOW: ***The fuel display, which uniquely includes the RCT*** CHRIS SLOAN

oneworld
EXIT
SALIDA
TO OPEN
PARA ABRIR
DANGER
PELIGRO
IA
939
ETOPS

“On November 14, the moment of truth arrived when EC-OIL was awarded the honour of operating the inaugural long-haul flight”

with only a 30in pitch in economy, leaving the real estate free for legs is a must. The Airbus Airspace cabin adds enhanced LED mood lighting, improved lightweight sidewalls and ceiling panels, added insulation in the forward fuselage section, a new lining as standard within the door and door-surround structures. There are also new heated floor panels in the entrance areas of doors L1 and L4, as well as a quieter fresh air vent outlets to reduce noise fatigue. The XLR's cabin altitude has been lowered to 6,000ft to create a more comfortable and less fatiguing in-flight environment for passengers and crew.

Four bathrooms offer antibacterial surfaces, taps with motion sensors and a pedal-operated waste container to round out the package. However, the lack of a mid-cabin lavatory in economy is a flaw, with two of the three small aft-located Space-Flex lavatories located adjacent to the small galley. The downside is a slower service flow, crowded lines to use the facilities and challenging work conditions for the crew.

To accommodate the longer flight durations and to match the widebody service, Iberia has installed increased capacity steam ovens, upgraded over convection ovens, for all cabins, plus an espresso machine and bun warmer in the business cabin. The outstanding DO & CO catering is obvious, but the smaller economy galleys result in little compromises regarding the quantity of provisions, but the high quality of the senior level crews makes up the difference.

Iberia's CFM International LEAP-1A-equipped XLR is a very quiet platform on take-off and in the cruise. The flight crew remarked that the heavier maximum take-off weight of the XLR gives the aircraft a smoother, more stable feel. The cabin and flight crew have come from Iberia's short- and medium-haul fleet, with cabin crew receiving two additional training days for ETOPS safety procedures and premium cabin service. Flight crew training incorporates new flight computers, flight logic for fly-by-wire, the fuel management system for the RCT and the thrust boost bump. At launch there were 53 qualified pilots, to be augmented by many more as additional aircraft are delivered.

Widebodies generally hold a speed edge over narrowbodies and the Iberia crew advised that the XLR cruises at a slower Mach 0.78 compared to the A330neo's 0.82 and A350's 0.85. On the Madrid-Boston route, this meant a longer westbound flight time of around 20-30 minutes and 10-15 minutes eastbound, according to Iberia chief pilot Captain José Luis del Valle Castano. Regardless of such a minuscule inconvenience, bypassing a hub saves time and is part of the reason the A321XLR is truly poised to take long-haul narrowbody flight into to the future.

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BELOW: ***EC-OIL at Barcelona after a domestic proving flight from Madrid on November 9***
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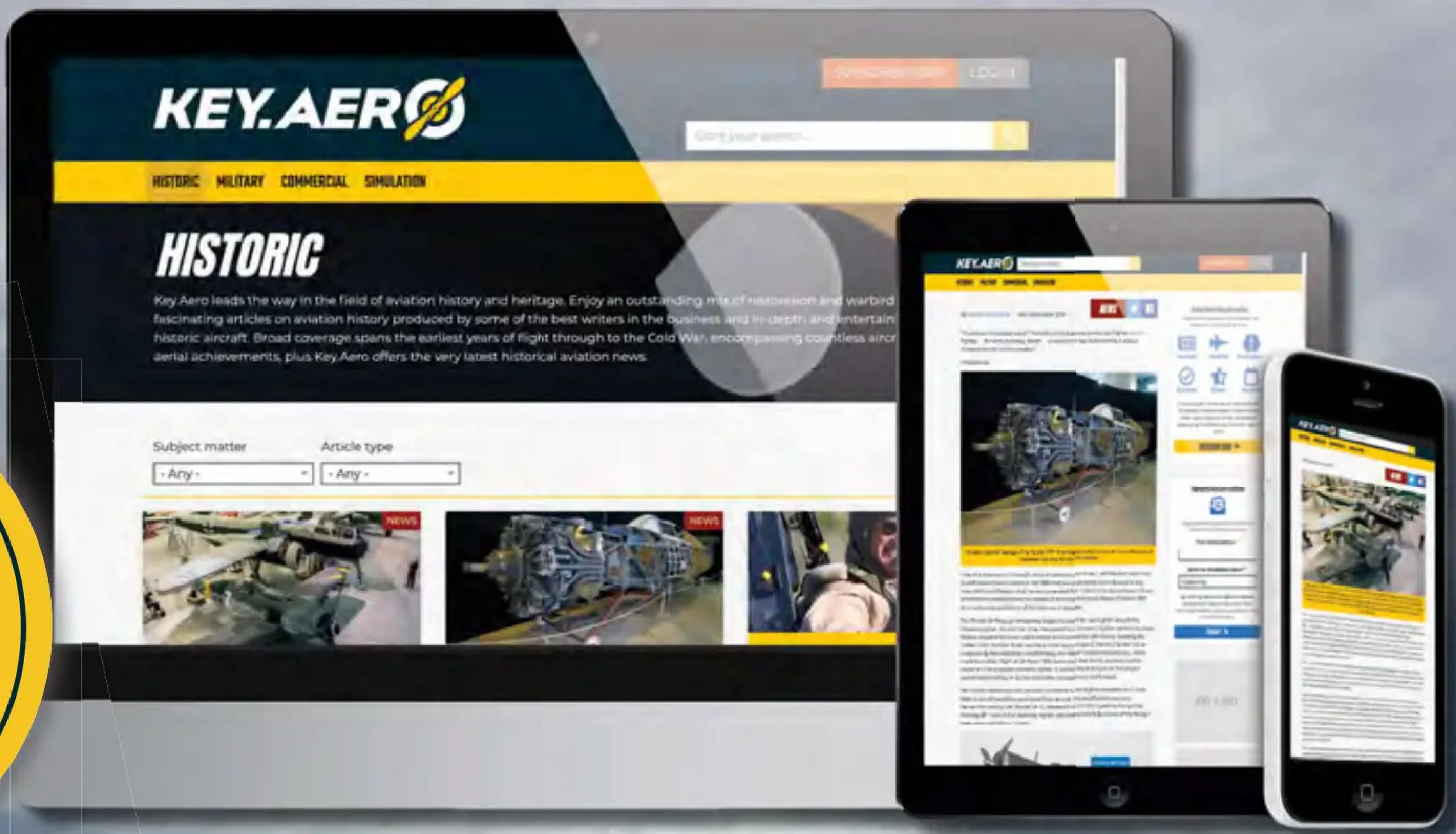
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